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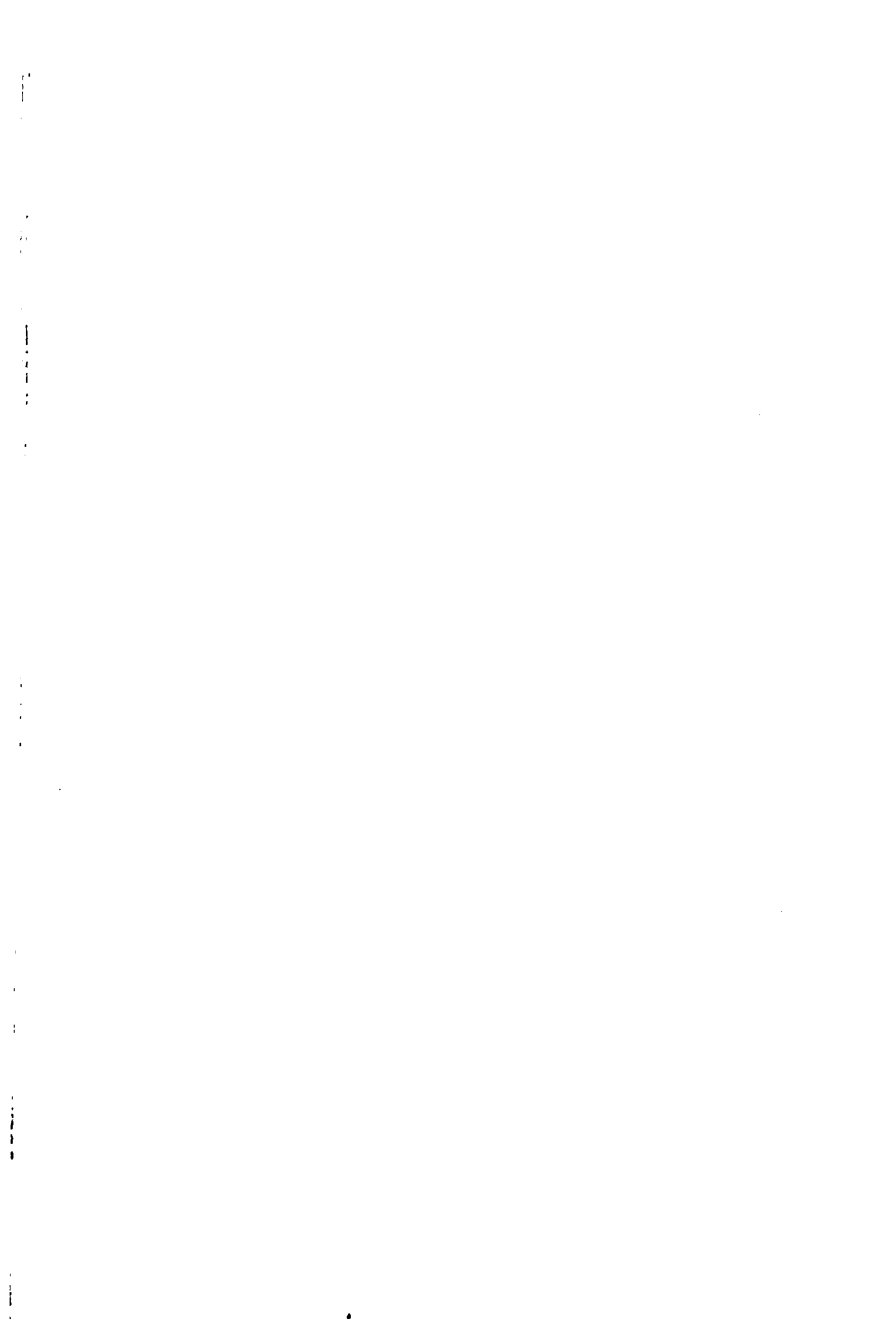
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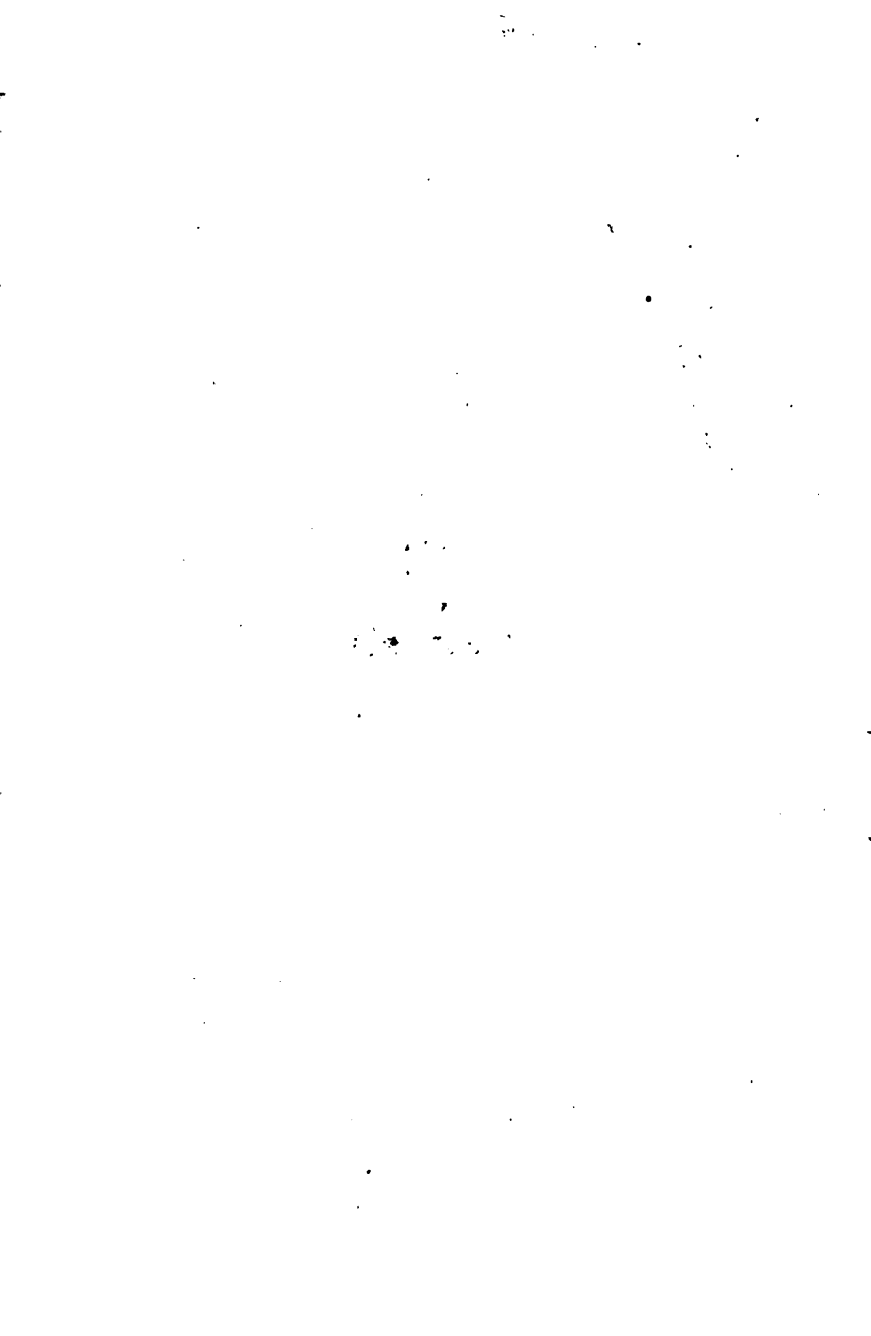






THE WAR CACHE







The wall was a little difficult . . . but Cicely went over it with twinkling ankles.

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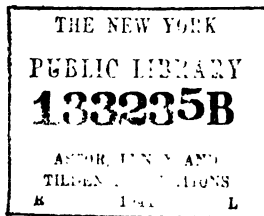
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1918



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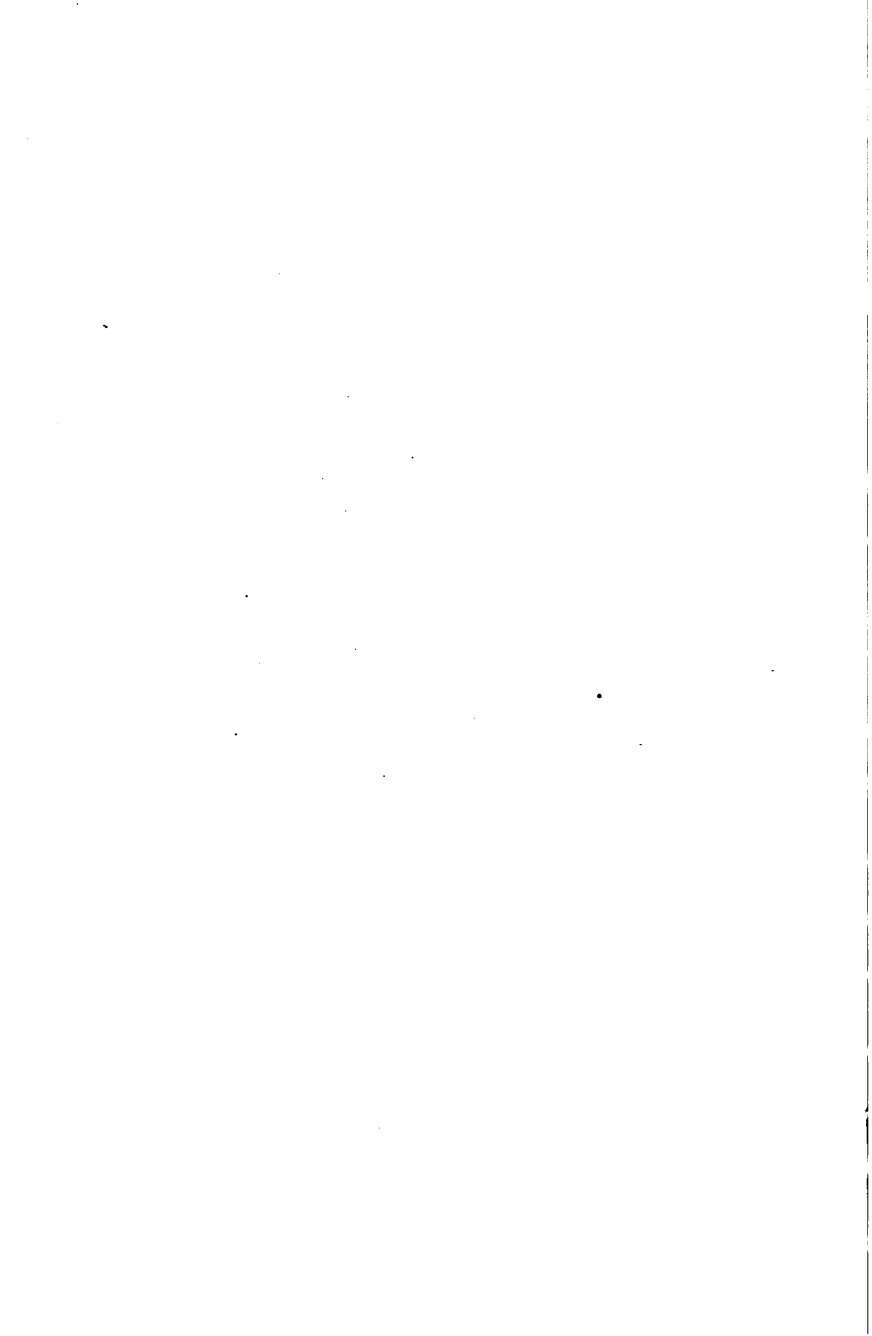
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THE WAR CACHE

CHAPTER I

THOROLD, the chemist, had munitioned with extreme intelligence. He had helped the Allies as well as any man of H.Q. rank. He had earned his country's gratitude; also he had earned himself a six-cylinder Napier.

Phillip (with two l's, and said slow, please) had earned from his country a rest. A medium-sized, scalloped-edged piece of H.E. shell in the leg had assisted him. He was enjoying the convalescent indolence of England. He considered Thorold's new six-cylinder the right medium to give him calm.

"Just a mile out, and back," he said to Thorold at his side. "Don't she run like the tongue of a military critic, Jimmy? So easy and smooth. Can you bribe the police about here?"

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Thorold sat back and held tight. He was glad that he had insured himself. He was glad that he had made a will in favour of his mother. From the corner of his eye he saw Phillip, beautiful and cool, not a hair awry, and his kit a thing of almost awesome perfection. Phillip didn't seem to think the six-cylinder was going fast. Perhaps this was a convalescent pace. Thorold was quite glad Phillip was not unwounded.

Phillip said—

“Would we slaughter anything if we went round that corner at a fair bat? I mean, is it necessary to slow up for gates or carts or cows?”

“It's a double hairpin, garnished with flint walls,” answered Thorold. “The village idiot invariably stands in the middle of the second turn to think of nothing. Bink's prize bull-pup usually sleeps on the crown of the road by the end of the first twist. Apart from that, I leave it to you.”

With a sigh, Phillip slackened speed. He hated to hurt bull-pups.

They went round the corner merrily. The

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village idiot was not there. The bull-pup was absent. But The Nurse was walking towards them.

Understand, she was not "a nurse"; she was "The Nurse." There are some nurses who don the Government's uniform and go under without a struggle. They are content, for so good a cause, to walk about under the public gaze in frocks done from the fashion-plate that Mrs. Noah thought so *chic*. There are others—The Nurse was one of the others.

She rose superior to her uniform. She looked human, she looked pretty. One wanted to smile at her—Phillip didn't even trouble about the want, he smiled. One wanted to have tea in front of her every day for a life. One wanted to have her in the car and hear her talk, and see her smile, and note the bright fire that came to her deep eyes, and see the sparkle of the colour warming her soft and vivid cheek, to hang breathless on the ripple of her comely lips . . . oh, she was The Nurse! Phillip had always known her to be The Nurse.

"I say," he shouted to Thorold, "how rip-

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ping she is! Who is she? Where does she come from?"

"She's the very prettiest," said Thorold. "Her name is Cicely—Cicely Baistain. She's in the town, at the 8th North-South-East Hospital, of course."

Phillip was already slowing.

"Sportin' of you to know her. We'll turn this merry little barrow round, swizz up to her, and mention that the best thing possible for nurses in the 8th N.S.E. Hospital is to go for rides in a six-cylinder Napier. Also, you will tell her I am a very fine man, a millionaire—and a 'Lonely Soldier.'"

"No good," said Thorold. "I don't know her—only by sight and name, and I wouldn't—"

"Nor would I," said Phillip, opening out again and continuing the run. "But it's very sad . . . if you only knew how keenly I've been looking for just that girl . . ."

He said presently—

"Anyhow, I will turn back and look at her again, presently."

A load seemed to come off Thorold's mind.

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The Staff-Major came along just as Phillip was about to turn, and spoilt his intention.

The Staff-Major was in a large, grim, and powerful car. "An unbaptised Tank," Phillip said. But he was driving slowly. He was looking about carefully, as though he had dropped something. As the six-cylinder swept by at its grand and silent rush, he looked up jerkily and suspiciously.

"Staff-Majors are ever suspicious," said Phillip. "They're always afraid that someone will make them Colonels before they've had their proper rest. Wasn't that one a blond brute?"

"I didn't notice," said Thorold.

"Oh, I always notice," said Phillip airily. "There was something about that one—clothes, perhaps. One of the impenetrable secrets of the war, Jimmy, is the place where Senior Staff Officers buy their clothes. No tailor has yet had the courage to own up."

"Shall we turn?"

"'Nother half-mile. If I come up too close to the Brass Hat he'll take me for the

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Hidden Hand looking for something cushy.”

They ran on. Thorold seemed a little bit anxious. Phillip the Bland, but also the Phillip who seemed to miss very little with his gay and casual eye, cried—

“Jimmy, I believe—”

“Eh?” gurgled Jimmy.

“Shall we run on, and not bother about Miss Cicely? Car going rippingly.”

“Oh, I say—no! I mean, I’ve got some work . . .” He saw the grinning subaltern.

“You devil, Phillip. You hooked me well.”

Phillip sighed.

“Ah, well, I shall have to die a bachelor. That was really the only girl . . .”

“So was Ines, so were Dora and Leila and Julie and—”

“Well, we might turn now,” said Phillip quickly. The man at the wheel has the tactical advantage.

“How long?” asked the natty young officer as they sped back.

“Well, I first saw her three weeks ago.”

“Three weeks—and you haven’t spoken! Is this trench warfare?”

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“Well, it’s awkward. . . . I don’t see how a man can . . . but I’ve seen her often . . . and looked at her.”

“Did she look at you?”

“Yes.”

“Every time?”

“Well, I didn’t count, you know.” Jimmy caught Phillip’s glance. “I don’t remember ever missing her eyes, anyhow,” he said boldly.

Phillip chuckled. He looked at his finely moulded, finely handsome friend. He guessed that, under the circo., perhaps, Cicely wouldn’t be such a stickler for the etiquette of introduction as Jimmy thought. After all, Jimmy was something big about here—his work was big. He must be well known. Also, he had seen the dawn of a shy smile on the bright lips of Cicely as they swung past her. He thought it might be for him. But—

Phillip had rather a breathless taste in clothes. There was that about the unerring perfection of his kit which abashed one. He had a marvellous parting in the middle, and his little moustache was the sort of little mous-

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tache that all subalterns dream will be theirs in Paradise. With his smooth and inscrutable face, his unruffled and debonair air, you would take him for a No. 1 exhibit of what a Young Subaltern should be. He was not so dazzling and perfect a thing as those young subalterns who appear on the stage. But nothing is as perfect as those. But he was the IT of real life.

He was the gilt-edged junior officer. He was wondrous to the eye.

There were some who thought he was merely a gallery exhibit—to be looked at, but not to be used. Some thought him a decoration, and sought to treat him as such.

They had only tried to do so once. The attempts proved dangerous. Phillip is magnificent, but he is also war. Under that parting in the middle is a very cool, swift brain that can do its thinking with a very daring efficiency. Beneath his inconsequence, his casualness, his flippancy, and his dandaical habit is a keenness, a will, and a capacity to bring about disaster to lesser men, whether they be Germans, spies, or bores. Phillip has

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the all-steel wits that lurk beneath the last word in British Warms.

These things must be mentioned. The Staff-Major adopted the idea that Phillip was a "nut," tried to crack him—and broke his teeth.

When they drew in sight of Nurse Cicely they also drew in sight of the Staff-Major.

"Look and learn, my young friend," said Phillip to Thorold. "Here is a gallant soldier man who doesn't believe in trench warfare."

The gallant soldier man was making the pace with Nurse Cicely. His big car was drawn up by the side of the road, and he was out of it. He was, in fact, on the other side of the road, close up to the nurse. He seemed to be talking to her very absorbingly. Phillip watched with his keen, casual eyes.

"The Great Offensive—behold it and learn, Jimmy," he drawled languidly.

"Oh—oh. He's probably some sort of friend—or relative," said Thorold, a little stiffly.

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"Oh, perfectly poss.," admitted Phillip. But he slowed down, which he needn't have done, for there was plenty of room.

"The Stern Uncle, perhaps, Jimmy, or the Heavy Father—what's your choice?" he asked impersonally. He slowed some more.

"How do I know?" snapped Jimmy testily. "Neither, should say. Perhaps a brother, or cousin, or something. Why put assy suggestions?"

"Because," said Phillip judicially, "because Cicely doesn't love him in the way she ought."

"Rather—rather rotten taste that sort of joke," stuttered Jimmy, very dignified.

"You will notice"—Phillip was quite unconcerned—"you will notice, my little lad, the curious grouping of car and couple. One is—"

"I say," said Thorold rather sharply.

"The dawn of brain in the bone of Jimmy is near at hand," went on the young officer. "You were just going to say, very snappily, that it is a rum thing Nurse Cicely shouldn't have crossed the road to her relative's car;

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rummer, perhaps, that he should have clambered out of his awkward, flat-nosed automobile to go across the road to her. That was what you were about to say, Jimmy."

"No, I wasn't," jerked the chemist. "But I see what you mean. It means that she really didn't want to meet him or speak with him."

"My dear Watson, your mind is like lightning. Nothing is hidden from you. I don't need to tell you that his engine is still running."

"Why shouldn't it?" said Thorold. He was trying to be sensible. After all, this was England, the Major was an officer: what Phillip hinted—that the officer was accosting, even bullying, the nurse—wasn't done. "I mean, the fact that the car is on one side of the road and . . ."

"An engine running free—war time being what it is in petrol permits—means that the Staff-bloke don't mean to stop long in his dallyance. Also, it might mean that he hopes to get off nippy in an emergency. Observe the lad of the bullioned hat. His manner is not

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the manner of the casual 'How-d'y-do and *au-revoir*' kind. Too vehement, and vehemence might mean hurry. So it seems . . ."

"I know," said Thorold, seeing reason. "She's wanted at the hospital—urgent case."

"We will now glance at that point of interest. You will pay careful attention to Nurse Cicely. Has she the look of one flying to the aid of the injured? Has she not . . .?"

They had drawn very close—had done so very silently. The pair on the roadside had not observed them. They were far too engrossed. The pair in the car could see that this was because the Staff-Major was absorbed by something very like bullying, the nurse by something very like fear.

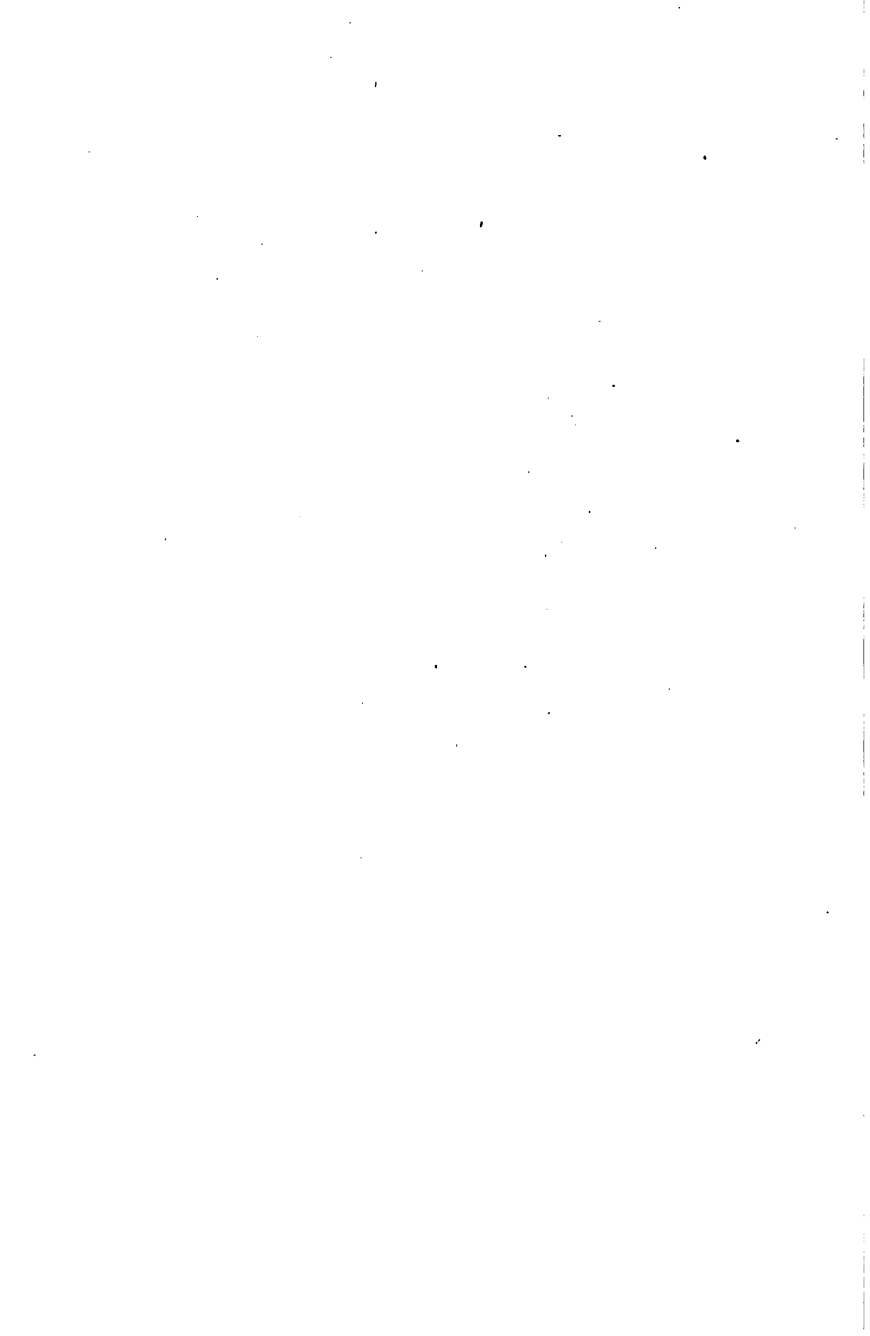
Thorold said, very quietly—he was a man who went quiet at critical times—"Phillip, I think you are quite right. That fellow is being a bit of a beast."

"There was something about him I didn't like from the first," commented Phillip. "Do you think it's his hat, Jimmy?"

The big Staff-Major suddenly crystallised things. He almost shouted. He took an



Nurse Cicely sprang back and there was real fear in her poise.



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angry stride forward. Nurse Cicely sprang back, and there was real fear in her poise. The Staff-Major's hand went out clutching. . . .

Phillip blew his horn: and as a horn it stunned rather than soothed.

The Staff-Major started back. Nurse Cicely swung round. Baffled anger was on the officer's face, the bright light of relief in the woman's.

Phillip nodded his head, beamed a friendliness for all the world over his steering-wheel.

"We don't butt in, do we, Cicely?" he said amiably. (Thorold, half out of the car, gurgled at that.) "I mean to say, don't you know, perhaps you'd rather we didn't run you back as we agreed."

He was watching the girl with his calm eyes. She was bright and pretty, and she looked crisp and sure. Would she rise to that?

"I—I—" she gasped. Then her wits came to her. "No—I'll come—yes, of course."

("I like you a lot," thought Phillip.

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"You've got *nous*. Pretty and capable and swift. I do like you.")

The Staff-Major had pulled himself together. He was glaring angrily, but carefully. He put his hand behind him, but noticed Thorold was close up beside him. Thorold was a big man. He let his hand drop. He didn't let his haughty manner drop, though. He observed the junior officerity of Phillip. He filled out his large chest.

"Who the brimstone are you, Sir?" he snarled. "What the regulations do you mean by sitting in the car, Sir? Before your superior officer, Sir?"

Phillip came out of the six-cylinder with his slow quickness. He became stiff. He rendered himself of a perfect salute.

"Sorry, Sir," he said blandly. "So anxious to know if Cicely was coming, Sir, I came a little bit ungunmed."

The big Brass Hat wasn't so stupid. It is a mistake to think his sort are. He swung round to the girl.

"Who are these people?" he demanded.

That stashed Thorold. He saw at once that

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the Major was a heavy father or a stern uncle. Phillip was not stashed. Probably because he was looking at Cicely.

"Well, Sir," he said in an admonitory voice, "if you don't know, I'm afraid there's something not quite—not quite O.K. about this. I am Cicely's cousin. Mr. Thorold here"—his eyes twinkled—"is her uncle."

Cicely gasped, but with a gasp of relief. The Staff-Major stepped back. He glared at Phillip. Phillip had him held with a serene and cherubic eye. His eye demanded, "What have you got to say about it to Cicely's male relatives, my brave lad?"

The Staff-Major goggled.

"Her cousin," he snapped. "I don't believe it. I believe this is a ruse." He suddenly pulled his bluff together. "Let me warn you, Sir."

Phillip's eyes glinted. He was calm, but perhaps he was anxious. He saw that the other was no fool. He saw that he was up to all the tricks, that he was going to use the best trick of all—the trick of discipline, which had all the British Army behind it. He didn't

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know the Staff-Major's little game, but he saw that the Staff-Major was going to play it well.

Heaven sent Thorold in where Phillip hesitated to tread.

"Look here, Sir," said Jimmy, the defiant of Brass Hats, "look here, we come upon you here, accosting Miss Baistain, threatening her, even—"

"Silence!" roared the Major. "I'll have no more of this. This is preposterous."

"It's true," burst in Miss Cicely. "He demanded—"

"Of course it's true," jerked Thorold. "Didn't I see it with my own eyes? You were treating her like a footpad, Sir. It was our duty to step in and stop that sort of thing."

"That's a lie, you fool," snarled the Major. "I was perfectly civil to the woman. I had a full reason."

He backed away before Thorold—backed towards his car.

"And let me warn you," he shouted. "You don't understand where you're meddling. This is a military matter, my man . . ." He was playing his best trick.

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"I don't care a trivet!" said Thorold, thoroughly warmed.

The Major played his best trick—played it to the junior officer in Phillip.

"Lieutenant," roared the Major, "I order you—"

Phillip came in.

"Oh, I don't think there's need for all this fuss," he said cheerily. "Uncle Jim's [that was Thorold] a bit hot about things, Sir, as you may understand. After all, we probably know each other pretty well, if we only knew, you know. Stobbat, for instance, is a dear old friend of my father's."

The Staff-Major gasped.

"Stobbat?"

There were none so startled as Phillip's innocent eyes.

"Yes, Sir. Stobbat, of course, Stobbat; 10234 Brigade—your brigade, Sir." He indicated the Staff-Major's badges. "Stobbat—your Brigadier, you know."

The Major gobbled and backed. He was properly unstuck.

"Brigadier—mine—Stobbat. No . . . I

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don't know. That is—you see—haven't reported yet . . . only just brigaded."

"Oh, I saw," said Phillip drily.

The Major looked angry and anxious and vicious. He seemed to wish that Thorold was not so near him.

"You saw—how—when?"

"Tabs," said Phillip.

"Tabs—what's wrong with my tabs?" He glanced fearfully at the scarlet patches on the revers of his tunic.

"Oh, they're nice tabs. Very comely tabs—tabs of the real spirit, Sir. But Stobbat is rather strict—p'raps you've heard. Must have tabs of the latest regulation pattern. Makes a totem of 'em, you know. Keeps a private tabbery to gloat over, Sir. The 1915 pattern you've got on, Sir—"

The Major did a startling thing. He jumped. He leapt. He was in his car in a flash. He was bumping her off in a flash. Before they could break from their surprise he was away, tearing like the deuce along the country road.

"Glory!" Thorold gasped. "That put the

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fear of the wrath to come into him, Phillip. My hat, is Stobbat really as bad as all that?"

"Don't ask me," said Phillip. "I don't know."

"Don't know? Phillip, you devil, have you been—is there such a man?"

"There may be, of course; only I've not heard of him."

"And the tabs—were they really 1915 pattern?"

"Oh, rather. And 1916 and 1917 too. Really nothing wrong with his tabs. It was his conscience, and—yes, and his hat."

"His hat? You said that before. What's behind it, Phillip—what does it all mean?"

"There's only one nation that's brazen enough to wear a very small hat with a very large head. Only the men of one nation will run like blazes in England when they suspect someone has discovered they are wearing a false uniform."

"My God! A German—a German spy!" shouted Thorold. "You didn't mean that—"

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Nurse Cicely spoke for the first time since the Major left.

"Yes, yes—he is that. He is a German and a spy. I have the proof."

"The hat test is infallible," said Phillip.

CHAPTER II

NURSE CICELY was before the two young men. She was beautiful, but she was pitiful too. Her crisp, her sparkling face was pale. In the deeps of her eyes there was real fear.

“Yes; that man was a German and a spy,” she cried. “He wanted something from me. And—and I don’t know *what* I am to do.”

She wrung her hands in desperate fashion.

“We are rather good in the ‘doing’ line ourselves,” said Phillip. “Trust us, Miss Cicely. As men of action, we hold certificates of the ‘Do It Now and Do It Well League.’”

Thorold said in his quiet and powerful way, “We’re here to help you, Miss Cicely.”

The Nurse looked from one to the other. Her glance passed lightly and swiftly over the Subaltern. It rested with an air of reassurance upon the big, resolute form of Jimmy Thorold.

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"Oh, thank you," she said—to Jimmy Thorold. "I *do* want help so—so enormously. If you could *only* help me—I'd thank you with all my heart."

It was Jimmy Thorold she was ready to thank with all her heart. As far as glances went, Phillip might have been a mere Byzantine effect in the landscape.

"The strong, silent Man rings the bell every time," reflected Phillip, with a sigh. "The packet of cigarettes got to him every try. Mere beauty. . . . Nobody will believe that there is anything more than the latest song from the latest revue living under my little hat."

He grinned drily. Phillip was the last to mind that.

"How can we help?" said Jimmy Thorold. "You only have to suggest a way."

The bright little lady threw a glance about her. She seemed to fear the open. Standing there on the highway so casually seemed to throw her out. She began hesitatingly—

"I—I . . . it's mixed up, and there's rather a lot to tell. I—I . . ."

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“Don’t want you to think that asking ladies to ride in cars has developed into a national pastime,” said Phillip easily, “but I would hint you should step into Thorold’s Napier and be wafted swiftly to Thorold’s works—the Thorold Chemical Combine, perhaps you know.” The little lady nodded—she knew. “At those works you could sit down and be comfortable, and tell us without disturbance.”

The Nurse flashed a bright glance at Phillip. Thorold said simply—

“If you would trust us, Miss Baistain, that would perhaps be the best.”

The Nurse flashed a brighter glance at Thorold.

She walked towards the car.

Phillip came into Thorold’s cosy office. The Nurse was sitting in the comfortable chair before the fire, Thorold was doing the efficient thing with the brandy and the liqueur-glasses. The Nurse had said “No.” But even nurses at military hospitals don’t always know how shaken they have been.

“I’ve rung up Dick Gibson at local H.Q.,”

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said Phillip amiably. "That Staff-Major is all wrong. They don't know him. They've never heard of him. They didn't even know that such a ripe specimen of Brass Hat lived or had his being within the charmed radius of the N.S.E. Command."

Phillip nerved himself with brandy in a liqueur-glass also.

"Moreover and aforesaid, the 10234th Brigade is in Salonika—in Salonika, observe, and our friend the Major isn't."

"I guessed that man was fishy, from the first," said Thorold.

"I know," said Phillip, with a grin. "I remember how you swept away my doubts."

"Of course he's fishy," said Nurse Cicely decisively. "He is a German and a spy, I know."

Both young men looked at her.

"I know," she cried; "I have reason. It was because of that he stopped me on the road."

The young men looked at her.

"You were saying," said Phillip softly.

"It is because of that I want you to help

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me. I have something—something on me which is, I think, extremely valuable to the German Government. That man wanted to get it—by fair means or foul, he wanted to get it. And, if I know him and his sort, he will still do his best to get it—by fair means or foul. That is why—”

“That is where we function,” put in Phillip dreamily. “This is where we come in and put Hindenburg off his little game—is that it, Miss Cicely?”

“Yes,” breathed Miss Cicely. “Yes. I am only a woman. This is a man’s job.”

Her bright eyes fixed themselves on Thorold.

“Why didn’t mother make a little man of *me?*” sighed Phillip.

“We’re going to help you, Miss Cicely,” Thorold told her. “Rely on us entirely. You’ve only got to tell us . . .”

“And in your own way,” added Phillip. “Don’t worry about the telling. We’ll pick it up.”

The glance which Miss Cicely threw at Phillip was curious and keen. It seemed that

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Phillip, unexpectedly, had a way of touching right home to her.

"I was just going to say that, Mr. Mainwaring," she admitted to Phillip. "It is all so mixed . . ."

Phillip nodded his jolly head. His nod seemed to say, "Life always is. But *we* know how to pick out the essential threads, don't we?"

Curiously, after that nod, Nurse Cicely took to looking most at Thorold, talking most to Phillip.

"I'll make it as pithy as possible," she began. "You can see for yourself—I'm in the Military Hospital. I'm in a mixed ward—part civilians, part soldiers. One of my cases is a wounded civilian.

"A Zepp. victim, you understand. His house was blown to pieces in the last raid—a little time ago. He had very bad fragment wounds and shock. He was on the fatal list. He was a little, unpleasant man. The only thing that made his case interesting was that his wife and little girl had been hit when his house was hit. He was so wrapped up in his

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wife and child. He was always asking for them—they were on the fatal list too. We pitied the poor fellow for that. We hoped he'd die first."

She paused to concentrate her memories.

"The queer part of the whole matter, we—or rather, I, for he was my case—found, was that he wasn't bitter. He didn't curse his enemy. He didn't hate the German who had done this to his family and his home."

"Not unusual," said Phillip. "Wounded men don't strafe Huns very much."

"I know," said the Nurse. "I'm only saying that it seemed unusual in the light of what followed. In the light, too, of his circumstances—for, you see, his little girl and wife were horribly cut about. Even wounded men can hate wounds to their wives and children . . . but this man said that war was war—that you couldn't mark shells so that they hit only soldiers."

She looked at Phillip.

"That did seem curiously philosophical under the circumstances. And then—well, listen what happened. He was always asking after

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his wife and baby. And it soon became certain that the wife, at least, would die before him. We broke the news as gently as we could . . . and his philosophy ceased.

"Yes, it ceased. He didn't say that the action of the Zeppelins was dastardly. On the other hand, he didn't say that war was war. He just stopped mentioning things. He became sullen. Then his wife died."

The Nurse stopped. She was a nurse—yes, but she had her heart.

"He was frightfully upset—frightfully," she said, after the slightest pause. "A woman doesn't know how wrapped up a man can be in another woman—until that other woman dies. The wife's death seemed to rend his soul from top to bottom. He was in anguish. And he began to speak his mind about the Zepps.

"No, he didn't curse them—not then. There was only a sort of smouldering rebellion. He said that as weapons they were too capricious—that they couldn't really aim or have direction. The wrong about them, he said, was that they were weapons of blind chance. He

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said that no nation had a right to employ a weapon they could not perfectly control. It was indiscriminate warfare—wicked.

“I’m only just giving you an idea of what he said. He didn’t really accuse; he was merely bitter and rebellious. He didn’t really hate, but cried out against the wantonness of the thing . . . that is, he didn’t do more than that until his child died.”

The Nurse sat back. The state of the man when his child had died must have been very terrible. That could be seen in her eyes.

“It was awful,” continued Nurse Cicely. “Of course, he was wounded and unstrung himself, and he knew he was dying—but never have I known a man so overcome. Hate—his hate chilled one’s very heart blood. He had swung from one extreme in philosophy to the other extreme. He raved. He raved. . . .

“It got so bad—well, we took him into the little private ward at the end of the big ward. We couldn’t have him disturbing the other men. But that didn’t check him. He hated. The things he said about Zeppelins and the Germans were frightful—so frightful that I

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couldn't stand it. I told him he mustn't say those things—even of Germans. I told him that."

A look born of ugly memory came into the Nurse's eyes.

"I'll remember what happened to the last of my days," she said slowly. "I'll remember. . . . He sat up. He sat up madly. He glared at me madly. He cried out—

"'Let me alone, Nurse. Let me alone. You don't understand what this black race is. You don't know what a vile thing the German is. I know.' He almost shouted then. 'I know. *I am a German!*'"

Nurse Cicely paused. She was seeing that ugly and dramatic scene once more. She shuddered softly.

"When did this happen?" asked Thorold.

"Yesterday."

Thorold seemed surprised. Phillip remained imperturbable.

Nurse Cicely went on—

"He told me, 'I am a German.' Then he waited, looking at me. He seemed to expect me to do something—strike him, curse him, or

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perhaps call in the military. Of course, I did nothing. I pushed him quietly back on his pillow. Told him that he was trying himself too much—such nervous excitement would hurt him. He lay back very quietly, looking at me deeply. Presently he said, in a level voice—

“‘Did you understand what I said, Nurse? I was not raving. I was speaking the truth. I am a German.’

“I told him that I had understood. I told him, ‘There is no such thing as race here. You are a badly wounded man. That is all that matters. Don’t worry.’

“He sighed, and I think he almost smiled. It was the first time he looked comforted.

“‘And if I tell you,’ he said, ‘if I tell you that I am of a bad kind of German, a kind you English loathe—a secret agent, what you would call a spy, what would you say?’

“He was trying to shock me. I would not be shocked.

“‘I would say the same thing,’ I told him. ‘There are no special compartments in a hospital—only wounded men.’

“He lay back calm then. He sighed, and

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seemed content. He seemed to have come to a point in his life—to have decided and become content. He watched me closely all that morning—it was in the morning—with eyes I thought much happier. I was glad of that. He would be dead in, perhaps, a week, and he knew it too. It was better that he should die easy.

“Before I went off duty he spoke to me again. He said—

“‘It is true what I told you, Nurse. I am a German and a spy. Or—I was. I do not think I am now. You British, there is a wonder in your kindness. We Germans laugh at it and you—call it softness, weakness. And we practise hardness, strength—with a Zepelin.’ His face became murderous as he said the last words. And he cursed in his own tongue. And I am glad I don’t understand German, for the words he said must have been terrible.

“He was still angry when he went on—

“‘Now I can see Germany as Germany is,’ he said. ‘I can see that our might is murder. By Bismarck! I can see it—for I have suf-

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ferred! He was quite overcome. 'But if I have suffered I have learnt. Soft and kind you English are, that is true—only I have learnt that it is better the world should be soft and kind than it should practise this slaughter of the innocents in the night.'

"His face became terrible. I thought his agony and anger would kill him. But he sat up. He said in a loud, clear voice—

"'I know the truth. I abandon Germany. I am for England.'

"He suddenly put his hand in the bosom of his shirt, pulled out a packet. He thrust it into my hands.

"'Quick, take this,' he said sharply; 'take it—take it! Be careful of it. Do not let it out of your hand, whatever befall. It is of enormous value. There is a paper there which is of vital importance to Germany. I dare not breathe even a hint of what that paper means. It is colossal. There is perhaps, a victory or defeat wrapped up in it. I beseech you, I am on my knees to you, to be careful with that paper. I ask you as you value your honour, your race . . .'

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"He stopped. I'm afraid I thought him a little bit mad. I was just going to speak to him when he called in a frightened whisper, 'Hide! Hide it! *Der lieber Gott*, hide it quick!'

"He startled me so that I pushed the packet into the front of my dress, and then pretended to be putting back his medicine bottles. The only man who came in was the R.A.M.C. orderly—a thick, quiet, clever, good-tempered fellow, who dealt with this case quite well. I was about to ask Johnson—the R.A.M.C. man—to get me something, so that I could speak to the sick man while he was away, when I caught the patient's eye. If ever an eye said, 'Don't talk,' that eye did. And, while I stood there surprised, he said, 'Well, good-night, Nurse.'

"I was so confused and startled that I answered 'Good-night,' and came away like a lamb."

"With the paper?" asked Phillip.

"Yes, the packet was still in my dress." She touched her breast. There was a slight crackle.

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"May I?" said Phillip, easily and calmly.

Nurse Cicely hesitated, and then nodded. "I was coming to this presently," she said; "but it doesn't matter."

From the bosom of her uniform she pulled a little, grimy packet, enveloped in oil-silk.

"I don't know that this will help," said Nurse Cicely. She opened the oilskin and brought out a single sheet of notepaper.

"It is in cipher."

"We ate nothing else but cipher at H.Q.," said Phillip amiably. "Being on the shelf has whetted my appetite."

He had produced a gold-and-platinum pencil and a little pad of paper from mystical recesses of his uniform.

"He didn't give a hint—the wounded man?" suggested Thorold.

"No—no more than I have said. The orderly came in, just—"

Phillip laughed.

"Here's a very dear old friend," he chuckled. "This is one of their Kindergarten school of ciphers. It is one of the first and easiest attempts in the line. We always used

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this one as a sort of Young Subaltern's First Reader to train the new Bloods of the Intelligence. It's pre-war, and I've decoded things more difficult in my sleep."

His brisk pencil was busy.

"He only said that." Nurse Cicely was speaking to Thorold. "He said that it was a big thing—enormously important."

Phillip stopped chuckling. His amiable eyes had grown narrow and keen.

"And I don't think he was a liar either," he said. "It has the hall-mark of importance. Listen."

He read, slowly and impressively—

"WAR CACHE. ENGLAND.

PP./39/.998352

DIRECTIONS

TO FIND

FULL PLANS AND DATA.

IMPORTANT. IMPORTANT.

IMPORTANT.

TO BE DESTROYED

IF IN THE SLIGHTEST DANGER."

CHAPTER III

**WAR CACHE ENGLAND, PP./39/
.998352.** That sounds important, don't you think, Jimmy? Has a fat and pompous ring—what?"

"I think you had better translate a bit. I'm just a civilian. To me it is still meaningless."

"Oh, I won't deceive you," said Phillip. "It has a deep Gordian Knot air to me too—as yet. We don't discover things by sleight of hand—not outside the passionate and painted pages of fiction, that is. But that's not the point. The point I would like to expose to your intelligence is this: somewhere in England the secretive Hun has hidden *something*—cached it, buried it, or otherwise rendered it obscure to the naked eye. That, I think you will agree with me, is big."

"But it might be anything—or nothing," said Nurse Cicely.

"Yes, Miss Cicely," said Phillip. "You

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have hit it. It is either anything or nothing—there is no between. Anything, which means everything. Nothing, which means—nothing. We will rule out Friend ‘Nothing.’ He is a non-starter. One doesn’t—at least, the German doesn’t—put the full facts of ‘nothing’ into a secret and elaborate cipher. The German hasn’t the *flair* for misleading people so subtly as that. On the other hand, if you know our Little Brother Hun, you will also know that, when he lays himself out to take care and trouble, it’s not for nothing. With all his faults, and I have noticed several, *cher* Fritz has a large, full-blooded way with him—for Fritz everything or nothing, as you say, Miss Cicely, all the time. That’s how I read this memo. The idea behind it is big. No hidden supply of *frankfurter* in air and worm tight boxes about this. There’s no evidence of it. Fritz has put his heart into the matter. He has been careful and elaborate; he has made the thing tricky. It is so big that he has done his best to eliminate risk—as I read this.”

“As you read it,” said Thorold. “But you

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haven't—well, not publicly. You've only read the headlines. What about the body of the matter? Does it say more? Does it explain the gravity of the title?"

"Yes, and again no," said Phillip. "Carefully, it says nothing explicit. By implication it holds out a rich acana (good word, 'acana') of suggestion. It is no more than it says to be. It directs one where to find the plans of the cache. No more than that. It merely says these plans are hidden in a sort of secret catacomb beneath a house."

"What house?" said Nurse Cicely quickly.

"The house known as No. 7, East Street, Thorpwold. The man who lives in that house is called Cobb."

Nurse Cicely sat up stiffly. The breath came swiftly through her teeth. Phillip looked at her.

"Cobb is the name of your Zepp. casualty?"

"Yes," the girl whispered.

"His real name is Brandt," said Phillip, "though I don't suppose that is of much importance. What is, is the fact that the enemy should think it necessary to put a cross-check

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on the secret. They've double-locked it, so to speak, and this paper is only the first turn of the key. Nothing can be done, nothing can be found out about the cache—where it is, what is in it, why it is so important—until we put our hands on the papers in Cobb's catacomb. This paper is no more than a hint."

Thorold leaned back. The exact thinker in him was troubled by this apparently trivial complexity.

"But it doesn't fit in, you know, Phillip," he insisted. "Where's the logic of all this childish trickery?"

"It's a sort of war logic, and that is sometimes infernally childish. There are a lot of folk with well-developed frontal areas who imagine modern war is a sort of deep, brainy, scientific test of rival grey matter. It may be that on occasions; most days it isn't. War, in a nutshell, is piling up obstacles in front of the other fellow, while trying to clamber over obstacles in front of oneself. There's this logic of war in the sheet of paper. There are two obstacles; you've got to get over this one before you get to the next, which is the one that

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most matters. To the man who doesn't know, this sheet of paper is absolutely essential—the man who hasn't read the paper knows nothing.”

“I see. Brandt, or Cobb, could easily destroy so small a piece—swallow it, no doubt.”

“You bull in one. A map, a schedule of directions, and a specification of the things in the cache are difficult things for the quick-lunch expert.”

“There might, however, be another sheet of paper.”

“I think not. It isn't usual. Also at the bottom of this sheet is a pencil note—for memorising, I think. It says, ‘If necessary, if duplicate plans are needed, write to G. B., of Rotterdam. Embody in letter a sentence about the wind blowing off a limb of an elm-tree. Add the code word.’ The code word, of course, isn't here, and ‘G. B., Rotterdam’ means nothing to us. When Brandt had committed the sheet to the memory of his digestion, the pencil note would have gone too. But he would have had it well in his head by then.”

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“Still, in the face of things, it does seem precarious trusting the whole secret to one man only.”

“Secret agent work—spying, if you like—as a pastime *is* precarious. Risks have to be taken, you know. They, the Germans, probably—in fact, obviously—had him under their eye.”

Nurse Cicely cleared her throat to speak. But Thorold didn't notice.

“Yes, that's it,” he jerked eagerly. “They must have had him under observation—other spies watching him, you know—then why keep the secret to one man only? Why?”

“You are singularly innocent of our little play-fellow the spy. A spy—a German spy—is a man you get to do dirty work, and don't trust. Nine-tenths of the population of the Kingdom of Spies is thoroughly untrustworthy. Spies are purveyors of illicit information, you see—that is, they are out for cash deals. Most believe in Free Trade. They are willing to sell any ripe knowledge to anybody—in fact, it is exceedingly difficult to get a reasonably reliable spy. In Great Britain,

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in this year of war, it is eminently difficult to put your hand on a reasonably reliable German spy. The life is exacting, whatever the pay. The British Intelligence has the air of being a very dull concern, but the mortality in secret agents is curiously excessive, all the same. The Huns can't help themselves, then; a good-class spy man, in these conditions, must be trusted. I take it that, but for the unfortunate aim of that Zeppelin, Brandt was as reliable as spies could be made. He was the only man among the scallywags who could be trusted with the real gist of the secret. The other scallywags had orders to watch him closely, naturally."

Again Nurse Cicely cleared her throat to speak. Thorold was still full of speculation.

"Still, if this paper got into British hands, by capture or—or in the way it did, I don't see that the other scallywags could do much."

"Not very much, perhaps—that's part of the risk of the game. They'd do their best, however. They'd try and baulk things. They'd try and prevent us knowing the full secret of the cache. Perhaps they have word that

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Brandt's house in Thorpwold is to be ransacked or burnt or blown up, or otherwise strafed, if any accident happened. They'd do all they could to hold us up until they got in touch with 'G. B., Rotterdam.' They'll do everything to spoil our chances. . . ." Phillip looked at Nurse Cicely.

"They'd even, in circumstances like the present, try by fair means or foul to get this paper out of enemy hands."

"Yes," cried the girl breathlessly, "yes; that's what they are doing. They are doing that—they are trying to get that paper back."

Thorold felt that he had been dense.

"Of course—of course!" he cried. "The Staff-Major."

"And perhaps others," said Phillip, smiling sweetly. "You forget, Nurse Cicely has only told us a part of her tale."

CHAPTER IV

HOW stupid we are," cried Jimmy. "We've simply started arguing before we've heard half the facts."

"Oh, I don't know," considered Phillip. "We've got a grip of the thing, anyhow. It'll give us a better working idea—help us to judge things better." He turned to the Nurse. "What followed after you had left the wounded man Brandt? You said the Orderly came in. Brandt called out 'Good-night' in a tone that caused you to hustle off. You came away from the little room at the end of the ward rather dazed and confused . . . after that?"

Nurse Cicely bent her eyes upon the table, concentrating her thoughts.

"I went back to my quarters—that was all then. All that had happened seemed to me to be exciting and strange, but unreal. It seemed so thoroughly fantastic. As a matter of fact, I thought Cobb—Brandt, that is—had

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been at least light-headed, if not mad. When I looked at the paper and saw it was in code, it *did* occur to me there might be something behind it. But a nurse meets the queerest people—so many patients have hidden fortunes, and secret papers—and I wasn't ready to be impressed. Anyhow, I do remember making up my mind that I would show the paper to the C.O. at the Hospital, in case it was important. When I had made up my mind to do that I then forgot the thing."

Phillip nodded. He knew a great deal about the humanness of human nature, you saw, by that nod.

"I didn't think of the matter again until I went on duty the next day—that is, this morning. Then I had to think of it . . . terribly. . . ."

She stopped and drew a deep breath.

"The wounded man—Cobb—was dead . . . suddenly dead."

"Heavens!" gasped Thorold.

"Brisk business," said Phillip tranquilly.

"You feel the shock," said Nurse Cicely to

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Thorold. "Imagine how I felt. It was painful, and not only to me, but to the others in the ward. You see, nobody expected him to die—not for a day or two, anyhow. The M.O. on duty then was puzzled, I could see. He talked about a sudden collapse, but he was far from sure of himself. He asked me how the patient had been the day before, and I told him Cobb—or Brandt—had been a little excited. I didn't tell him anything about the paper business—I thought it wise to reserve that for the C.O. The other things I said didn't help, for the doctor, while talking of heart failure, also said that he wanted to get Mr. Locke's opinion. . . ."

"Mr. Locke?"—from Phillip.

"He doesn't matter, really; he was the doctor in charge during the afternoon—he would be the man who saw Cobb last."

"Sorry to interrupt," smiled Phillip. "One likes to get all the facts. Please go on, Miss Cicely."

"The M.O. went off, saying he was going to telephone Locke. He still talked heavily of heart failure, but it was easy to see the deep

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fog of perplexity about him. When he had gone I went into the little ward where Cobb lay dead.”

Again Nurse Cicely thought, arranging her memories carefully.

“I examined Cobb closely myself. There was no sign, none at all, of—of anything strange. No outward sign of—well, of the unusual. Heart failure seemed the only explanation of his end—yet heart failure was so unexpected. I felt convinced it wasn’t that. As I looked down at him I felt almost certain it hadn’t been his heart. And then, on that sceptical impulse, I did something that gave me proof.

“You know there is a little locker at the side of every bed in the hospital. The patient keeps his oddments in it. I bent down to Cobb’s locker and opened it. It had been plundered. No, not swept bare, just plundered. His medicine bottles, watch, and other trinkets were still on the shelves, but everything in the shape of paper had gone. Even a pocket Bible, which he used often, and which I had noticed when I had pretended to

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put the medicine bottles away yesterday—even that was gone.

“I knew then that Cobb’s death wasn’t heart failure. It was murder. I knew then that all the man had told me had been true, and that he had been killed so that he would tell no more.

“Full of horror, I stood looking at that plundered locker. And as I looked I knew I must go to the C.O. at once. I saw, now, how important it all was—killing was in it. And then—I was afraid. The paper was even then in my bodice—and Cobb had been killed for that paper. I remember I pulled myself together, saying, ‘I must go to the C.O. *now.*’ And I turned to go.

“As I turned I saw the R.A.M.C. orderly, Johnson. He was standing just inside the doorway, looking at me steadily.”

Nurse Cicely paused. Then she made a strictly feminine gesture of decision.

“I saw what that man was at once,” she cried. “I knew my danger. He was looking at me quietly, without threat, but there was something in his eyes . . . I feared him. I

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knew I had to fight him with my wits. I said very sharply—

“Well, what do you want, Johnson?”

“‘Beg pardon, Nurse,’ he said, in his smiling way—but it wasn’t good humour in his smile then, only grim wickedness—‘Beg pardon, Nurse, the C.O. has sent word he wants this man’s papers. *All* of them.’

“Perhaps I was a trifle too defiant. I said, pointedly—

“‘There are none here—his locker has already been emptied. Didn’t you know?’

“He smiled cruelly as he looked at me.

“‘I know there are none *there*, Nurse,’ he said softly. And he moved inward, and he swung the door closed as he moved. ‘I have already cleared that locker, Nurse—for the C.O. The C.O. isn’t satisfied. He says there is one paper missing—one missing, Nurse. And it is very important—*very*.’

“He took a step towards me.

“‘Well?’ said I, quaking and knowing I had been a fool.

“‘Perhaps you might have found it, Nurse,’ he said.

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"I tried to bluff him.

"'If I find it,' I said, 'I'll take it to the C.O.'"

"He was close to me then. I was fearfully afraid.

"'If,' he whispered, and his whisper just curdled my blood. 'If— Perhaps you will not find it—perhaps you have no need to find it. *Perhaps you already have it, Nurse—* already found it, Nurse, eh?'"

"I knew that the paper—that I—was in terrible danger. *How* I tried to bluff the brute. I said—

"'If you have any innuendo to make, I will be glad to come with you to the C.O. If not, you had better leave this room and attend to your other duties. There are such things as reporting orderlies for rudeness.'"

"He just ignored that. He came right up to me. He snarled in my face. He was anxious, no doubt—there was a sound of people bustling about outside the door. He said savagely—

"'You have that paper, Nurse, and I want it. I have my orders to be firm. Perhaps you

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will understand that: I am to be firm—very firm.’

“I fell back before him. I was ready to scream. I saw how thick-set and brutal he was. I saw that he would stop at nothing—most of all, I saw how important this paper must be.

“I fell back before him. If I could only dodge by him.

“He was quick. He was like a tiger. He growled, ‘Fool woman,’ and caught my wrist. It was flashing and sudden. With a quick jerk he flung me on to the bed—on to the body of the dead man. His great, thick hand snatched at my dress. . . .

“I was ready to give in—somehow I daren’t scream. I knew I was done; but I wasn’t. There is a providence which watches over fools and women. As Johnson tore at my dress Dr. Locke came to the door. I heard him calling out in his high voice—

“‘Please tell Nurse Baistain I want her to come here about this Zepp. casualty. I’ll be in here . . .’

“He came in. I could have hugged him. I

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tried to call out, but he himself called out first—

“ ‘Hullo, what the devil’s this?’

“The orderly was upright in a flash. He was never at loss.

“ ‘She’s fainted,’ he snapped. ‘I’ll get some *sal volatile* . . .’ He was out of the door even as he spoke.

“I was on my feet quickly too. I called out—

“ ‘That man! Stop him! Stop him!’

“That idiot Locke spoiled it—of course, he didn’t understand. He thought I was ill. He tried to soothe me. He said—

“ ‘That’s all right—that’s all right. Keep quiet . . .’

“ ‘Quick!’ I called, trying to get by. ‘Stop that man. He attacked me . . .!’ Even then I had the feeling to keep the paper dark. But, even if I’d called out ‘spy,’ I was too late. When I got some sense into them all, Johnson the orderly had disappeared. He had jumped into the stretcher-lift, and got to the ground like lightning. A car was waiting for him. He went off in that—vanished.

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“They tried to get things out of me—tried to find out what it was all about. But I said ‘No.’ I would see the C.O., and no one else. I had just become suspicious of every mortal man. I said I would go to the C.O. there and then. At that they told me not to be a fool. The C.O. had left the hospital yesterday. And he would be away for a week. That was another thing that showed what Johnson was.

“I’m afraid that, and what had gone before, just finished me. I broke down. I sat on a chair and gave a mild exhibition of hysterics. That seemed to make them think the orderly had not been far wrong. I was unwell. They were all sure of this. They told me to go off duty and rest. To take a thorough rest—a week of it. The C.O. would be away for a week; I had better stay off duty for a week, go away even—and then come back rested, to see him. It was their way of dealing with a nerve strung, hysterical subject.

“Well, I was ready enough. I had enough on my mind to require quietness. I went back to my quarters, and sat and tried to think. I had my lunch, and tried to think. But, as I

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thought of nothing hopeful or useful and good, I despaired. I came out on a walk in despair. I thought walking would help me to see matters clearly."

"Whereas," said Phillip, "it positively strewn your path with Staff-Majors and things."

"Ah, yes!" put in Thorold. "*What* about that Major?"

"Very little," said Nurse Cicely, with a smile. "Very little, thanks to you. He came up behind me, stopped his car, and asked me if he could give me a lift. I didn't want a lift. I felt that he was wrong too. I declined. Then he got out of his car, and tried to persuade me to take a ride. For me that was worse. On my refusal, he tried to bully me into taking a ride . . . that is where you came up."

The three sat silent for a minute.

Thorold turned to the girl.

"What pluck you have, Nurse Cicely! You faced them out splendidly, in spite of their being the determined and efficient brutes they are."

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"They're bright lads, aren't they?" put in Phillip. "They don't let little things like killing or kidnapping disturb their happy thoughts, and they don't let grass sprout, either, eh?"

"Nor must we," said Thorold gravely. "By George, nor must we!"

"My method was more allusive, but I was hinting at the same need of action and urgency," admitted Phillip.

"We *must* do something," urged Cicely.

"And quickly," snapped Jimmy. "We must go to the Military Depôt at once. My car—"

Phillip smiled amiably.

"You said 'quickly,'" he protested.

"But, my dear fellow, that car—"

"There are no spots on that car," said Phillip. "Also, I have a feeling that that little car is going to be a good pal. I was thinking of the Depôt—especially the Military portion of it."

"What's wrong there?"

"I'm not going to say anything about the Army. The Army's all right. The Army has

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the right bulldog manner. Again, I will not hint that the Army will be blind to the meaning of this paper. They will grip on to it. They will make the machinery go round merrily. But—”

Thorold's eyebrows went up. Nurse Cicely got up and walked about the office. Her feminine sense rebelled against Phillip's casualness. Phillip answered the eyebrows.

“I have known some Divisions where a demand, not in triplicate either, has brought a portable asbestos-lined camp along by return of lorry,” he said speculatively. “At the same time, I wot of others where the vermilion tape is still winding itself round the bundles of memos. which asked in August 1914 for no more than ‘Salt, common, table, one pound of.’”

“You mean that, if we go to H.Q., the people there will procrastinate, and all the chances this paper offers will be lost?”

“I don't mean that—not exactly. I mean that that *might* happen. There are all sorts of H.Q.'s—Dens of red-hot efficiency as well as Pits of Abaddon set down by the waters of

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Lethe. I don't know the local H.Q. It may be the most hustling of its group. But the only wise way to test an H.Q. is with something that isn't a 'rush order.' "

"This is a rush order."

"Oh, quite."

"You mean—we should tackle it ourselves?"

Phillip looked at him, smiling. But there was a touch of unsheathed steel under the smile.

"Those chaps," he drawled, referring to the Germans, "those chaps are not dawdling by the wayside to pause and browse and quote Ella Wheeler Wilcox to the grass. . . . How dare we?"

"And we've got to beat them. By Huxley, yes!"

"They're going all out. So must we," said Phillip. "We can't handicap ourselves with anything. We must be in Brandt's house and in his catacomb before they realise that Brandt's house is No. 2 move in the game. There's no silken dalliance in matters concerning the Hun."

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"Of course, you're right. We'll start now—this moment."

"Well, just as soon as you can get the six-cylinder round to the door will do. And if you have a jolly little pistol, take him along for company. I've only one myself."

"There's an automatic in this drawer." Thorold was pulling out a drawer. "I'll phone the garage."

"Mr. Thorold—Mr. Mainwairing," called Nurse Cicely from the window, "come here—quickly. . . . That man going in through the yard gates, that civilian—that is the R.A.M.C. orderly, Johnson."

Phillip grinned.

"They don't get dusty standing still, these Germans. Jump, Jimmy. Work of a dirty kind is about to be done at the crossroads."

CHAPTER V

JIMMY sprang towards the door. Phillip allowed him to go first. At the door Thorold checked.

"Where to?" he called. "Where to?"

"Your garage," said Phillip. "And the shortest way, please."

Thorold made another stride, and he stopped again.

"Oh, but the phone will be quicker. Quick, Phillip, I'll be through in a trice."

"Lead on, brother—at the run," urged Phillip. "Any wisdom you may pour into the phone will avail nothing against the Hun. This is the moment when the personal touch will tip the scale."

As Thorold ran downstairs, he grumbled.

"My garage is a deuce of a distance away. Right through the factory-yards. A word to my chauffeur would have saved precious time. You don't know my chauffeur."

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"He is probably a gilt-edged chauffeur, though I don't know him. On the other hand, I know our Boche. There are moments when even the best chauffeurs are not proof against his wiles. Run, Thorold, my lad; damee, don't let me beat you at the hundred yards' dash!"

"I was remembering your leg—the wound."

"Don't. I was forgetting it. Excitement is a perfect, if temporary, cure. 'Sides, as long as you arrive before Mr. Fritz Johnson gets busy, I am content to be an 'also ran.'"

They sprinted through the yards. Very quickly they were beyond the big factory buildings, in that grim and empty place behind. Quickly they passed through the great stacks of lumber, old packing-cases and new, empty carboys, piles of glass vessels, old machinery, and general litter that inevitably fills the desert spaces of a large works. Beyond this pile, set at that remote place where the peril of fire by petrol would not endanger both the chemical works and its insurance, was the garage. It was a biggish, clean place, set by itself. It had a large sliding motor door

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filling its end, and a small service door at the side. There was a convenient gate-entrance into a side street from the factory-yard, though none from the garage. The gate-entrance was at that moment shut. Thorold thought this explained things.

"That's why, thank goodness, the fellow came round by the front. Wonder how he got past the timekeeper?"

Phillip was puffing a little.

"It'd be a wonder if he didn't. One of the striking amenities of British life is that you can always get by the doorkeeper—don't matter where it is, your factory or the War Office. All you've to do is to say you want somebody, fill up a paper, and go in. Gettin' out, of course, is another matter. People who want to get out of factories, or War Offices, are subjected to enormous vigilance. If you haven't got the jolly little paper you first signed, you go to jail. The British race is a great friend to the man who wants to do murder in ease and comfort."

Thorold eased, now that the garage was at hand. He laughed softly.

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"Phillip, you will break into a monologue on your death-bed."

"I think I shall," admitted Phillip. "It'll be a most interestin' occasion, and I don't think any of the death-bed rhetoricians have done the business quite well . . . and then, I'm always eloquent at moments of stress. . . . There's our lethal friend."

They were at the big door of the garage. Inside the garage, near the bonnet of the Napier, was the ex-orderly Johnson. Before him was Thorold's gilt-edged chauffeur, smiling ruefully, but deferentially. Thorold was going forward in wrath and anger. Phillip held his arm.

"Let him get away from the bonnet," he whispered. "I don't like Germans near the bonnets of cars—their presence at that spot strikes me as being abnormal."

"Ah," breathed Jimmy. "He might damage the machinery."

"As I said," agreed Phillip. "Good . . . he moves to assume control."

The spy walked a little forward, talking to the chauffeur, and the chauffeur nodded. The

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man put his foot on the running-board, prepared to mount.

"Go in now," said Phillip. "You talk; it's your car. Try a mild, unsuspecting, thoroughly bovine air at first. Mildness is a great asset."

Thorold walked forward.

"What is this fellow doing here, Cudd?" he said sternly to the chauffeur.

"No more than you've allowed, Sir," said the chauffeur, not without a sense of huffiness in his tone.

"I've allowed nothing," said Thorold, puzzled but wary.

Cudd's sense of injury grew. "Well, 'ere you are, Sir. 'E comes with papers and all. Signed an' all. Wot more do a man . . ."

"Show me those papers, please," said Thorold tersely.

The ex-orderly turned round, facing full. Thorold noticed that the man examined him coolly, and only him. Also, the examination was slightly insolent. When he had finished his calm regard he said crisply, in perfect English—

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"Would you mind telling me who you are?"

Thorold gasped. He saw that Phillip was right—that in dealing with these beauties one wasn't dealing with fools. This man had, obviously, not merely courage, but the cleverness to play a great bluff hand. Jimmy expected Phillip to make some Phillipic comment; Phillip, somewhere behind him, kept uniquely silent. "Anyhow, it's my car; suppose I must carry on on my own," he reflected. He recalled that Phillip had advised an air of unsuspectance and simplicity. He answered the man civilly—

"I am the owner of that car, and these works." That ought to put a spoke in the fellow's wheel.

It did not. The fellow was amazing. He frowned, he seemed to doubt.

"Is that true?" he asked.

Thorold gasped. He felt inclined to punch the fellow's head. But he said, diplomatically, "Ask the chauffeur."

"Tryin' ter be comick?" said Cudd. "O' course it's Mr. Thorold."

Magnificent spy. He came down a step, as

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it were, in deportment. His insolence took upon itself a tinge of subservience. It was beautifully done.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Thorold," he said. "But, really, since it is your signature on my requisition papers, naturally it seemed strange you should want to know about me."

This was almost too bewildering for Thorold. The bluff was too enormous. He felt Phillip was the right man to deal with it, and yet Phillip the loquacious would not speak. Also, the man seemed to think there wasn't anybody else here who mattered but him. Mentally he floundered. He cried, "I signed your papers—that's nonsense!"

The spy did surprise admirably. He put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a little bundle of papers—some of them of official blue, some of official buff.

"I don't understand you at all, Mr. Thorold," he cried. "When I called at your office with the C.O. Transport's requisition there was no suggestion of friction. I can't understand . . ."

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Thorold tried to grip things together. The man's assumption of regret was perfect.

"Let's get to the bottom of this," he cried. "What is this requisition?"

"That's it," put in Cudd savagely. "Transport Officer wants use of th' car—th' fastest car in the district. Wants it in King's name. Wants it at once. Bearer of papers to take same away. It's all O.K. in them papers—the Officer's, and the one with yor signature on, Mr. Thorold. Wot's a man goin' to do in face o' that?"

Thorold felt that he was swimming in a sea too deep and strong for him. He felt that he, a man inexperienced in trickery, was playing a game against a system that left no details to chance. He felt that Phillip, after all, was the only man to deal with this matter. Presently Phillip, who was so silent, would put in one of his amiable but thoroughly destructive questions, and they would confound this brute spy. Until then he must fight as best he could. He asked, "Do you mind my seeing those papers?"

The man, with one foot on the running-

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board of the Napier, looked at Thorold closely. He seemed to decide that his wits could conquer the chemist's; he was probably certain that all there were quite ignorant of his personality; also, he probably saw that there was nothing for it but to keep up the bluff. He took his foot off the running-board, he advanced a step. He held out the papers.

"Most certainly you can see them, Mr. Thorold. You will find them quite in order, I think."

Thorold took the papers. Indeed they were all in order. He looked at his own signature. That was the bemusing part of the matter—it was his own signature.

"All the same, I didn't sign this," he said, frowning.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Is it your signature?" he demanded.

As he spoke, and with a casualness they did not notice, he moved a little forward, so that they had to move a little away from him. It was one of the most natural movements. Only it penned Thorold and Cudd into the angle made by the garage wall and the half-opened

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door. At a moment of action they would be at his mercy.

"It is like my signature—only, I never signed this paper."

"I must doubt your statement," said the man firmly. "I presented that paper at your office. It was taken through to your room. It came out with your signature."

"I can't help that," said Thorold angrily. "I know nothing of this business."

"I cannot help it, either," said the man resolutely. "I have my duty to do, Sir. Since my papers are all in order, I must do it."

"Oh, must you?" barked Thorold. "Why didn't Phillip help?"

"I will!" snapped the man. He swung on the bewildered Cudd. "I call on you in the name of the King to help me in the course of my duty."

"Look 'ere, leave me out," mouthed Cudd.

Thorold suddenly saw that he need no longer be unsuspecting and simple.

"Duty be damned—this isn't my signature!"

"And I say it is," snarled the spy.

"Why not compromise on the matter?" said

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an easy voice *behind* the spy. "Such a jolly thing, compromise. Let's all look at things from another point of view. Let us say the signature is not really the signature of one James Thorold, but a signature infernally like it—as like as one of those dinky little rubber stamps, cunningly applied, can make it. Let us say that."

The spy jumped—well, he had reason to jump. He had thought his rear was safe. He jumped with cunning, not merely round, but for the Napier. He would have landed on the running-board of the car, only Phillip was standing on the running-board. The impact of Phillip's left hand thrust the fellow off.

He staggered back, glaring. He saw, too late, he had neglected the service door of the garage, and that a third enemy, Phillip, had slipped in behind him. He saw defeat, but he acted at once.

"Be careful," he shouted. "You can be imprisoned for this."

His right hand forked back quickly to his hip. The Germans have the "Do It Now" spirit.

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"Hit him on the elbow, Cudd—hard!" snapped Phillip.

And Cudd hit. The Briton may lack some of the brighter finesse of spying, but for justly and swiftly applying the full power of muscle and body in a blow he is Number One *all the time*.

Cudd's blow was the blow of a boxer—half-arm, as quick as a flash, timed to a hair, and extraordinarily painful. The spy howled. He jerked his smitten arm. An automatic pistol fell with a heavy bump on the cement floor of the garage.

Cudd put his foot on the pistol. The spy fell back a step, using language of a burning and torrential diction.

"More from your attitude than from what you say," said Phillip, sadly, "I gather that you are not really grateful to friend Cudd. But, believe me, his act wasn't unkindly. I would almost go as far as to say he saved you from a very awkward dissolution—Mr. Johnson."

As he spoke, Phillip raised his right hand. Balanced on its palm was a small but very

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workmanlike revolver. He looked at the revolver. He looked at the spy.

The spy did a surprising thing. He too looked at the revolver, and he sneered. He stiffened himself. He walked with the greatest calmness to the wide doors of the garage.

"Shoot away," he called: "shoot away."

For a minute even Phillip hesitated. Cudd, on the other hand, jumped forward to grapple. As Cudd blundered into the line of fire the spy laughed—he had won his point. He turned like lightning, doubled round the corner of the building, rushed for the gate leading to the side street. Thorold shouted—

"That's all right. That gate will stop him—it's locked."

"Sorry; I should have mentioned what I thought about that gate before," said Phillip. "*They* don't forget little details of that sort. I am guilty of bad Staff work."

And *they* hadn't. The gate that should have been locked was open. A push, and the man had forced it ajar and had slipped out, free. Cudd wanted to follow. Phillip stopped him.

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There was no knowing what was on the other side.

“One to them,” he said. “That stunning piece of bluff caught me bending. You’ve got to keep all the nuts screwed up when facing brother Boche.”

CHAPTER VI

WHAT next?" demanded Thorold.
"Thorpwold; and on the top gear, I suggest. Also, we'd be very wise men if we got the car round to your office. Some bright lad might yet requisition or otherwise play havoc with its running gear. Can we get it through these yards?"

"Yes," cried Thorold. "Come along."

"And we'll take all the petrol you have, too," suggested Phillip. "Thank the Lord you're a munitioneer, and have a large and healthy supply of the speed-giving fluid."

They loaded up the car. Phillip sat beautifully at the steering-wheel while they did it, for he had been sprinting on a gammy leg, and that leg was beginning to speak to him in terms of revolt. When they had loaded, he said cheerfully—

"Cudd, be bright and lock up everything—

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I mean that little side-door which friend Johnson overlooked, as well as the big sliding doors. And if there are any blinds to your windows—”

“There are blinds, Sir,” Cudd shouted. “Perlice regulations.”

“Cheery old regulations—first time I’ve ever loved ’em. Sorry you’ve got a skylight, though.”

“Why fuss?” said Thorold. “If the car’s with us . . .”

“Skylight all right, Sir,” said Cudd. “Glass painted green, also draw blinds, which I’ve drawn. They won’t be able to see wot’s inside or isn’t, Sir.”

Phillip beamed on Thorold.

“Cudd bites,” he said. “Cudd the gilt-edged wots of the value of delaying action. Observing a garage heavily locked, barred, and bolted, the agile mind of Germany will grasp the fact that there is something precious inside. Perhaps you follow, Jimmy?”

“Oh, quite. All the same, directly we start, directly we pass out through the factory gates they’ll see that the only precious thing inside

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the garage is air. They'll know the truth in less than half an hour."

"Half-hours, like the curve of Cleopatra's nose, may change the destinies of the world," mentioned Phillip. "Warmed and comforted by that excessive padlock which Cudd now manipulates, they will probably be lulled. The sudden appearance of ourselves and car will be a shock to 'em. We reap the reward of shock. For the same reason, let us get the car to your office before they creep back to 'look see.' "

Thorold got into the car. He was ready for Phillip to start. Phillip was looking at Cudd, languidly, speculatively.

"Cudd," he jerked neatly, "what was your regiment?"

Cudd, without a flicker of surprise, came up to the car, and stood at attention.

"No regiment, Sir. Navy man, Mr. Mainwairing."

"Better still," murmured the glittering young man. "You look a lad of the 'sit tight, carry on, and be damned' guild. Is that on your discharge, Cudd?"

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"Don't know, Sir. Served five years, Sir, no crimes; put out at the Bight fight, Sir. Bit o' six-inch shell; not uncomfutable to me, Sir, but impressive to doctors."

"So! Sorry to be out of it all?"

"No, Sir; not *me*. A quiet life suits 'yours truly' to the ground."

"I think," said Phillip to Thorold, "Cudd's the man for us. Cudd, my lad, we're on a dangerous job. There may be some scrapping, there may be some wounds flying around—you might even get 'scuppered.' I don't promise, mind you, but these lethal and painful things are in the air. Will you come?"

Cudd, who wanted the quiet life, grinned.

"How *can* you ask, Sir? When do we start?"

Phillip's head indicated the tonneau with a nod. Cudd, grinning, climbed in.

"Must have somebody to hold the car's head while we're away, and to make himself useful at purple moments," said Phillip, and he started the car. As they crawled along the yards, Thorold was trying to get events into that logical and exact sequence beloved of all scientists.

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"There's a meaning in it all, obviously," he said to Phillip. "Exactly what it is and where it is I can't see. Why this rather trivial plan? Why try to scupper my car? They must see that can't possibly matter much. The car's not vital—we have a score of avenues. We can get away to Thorpwold or anywhere by a score of other methods—roads, trains, other cars . . ."

"Curb your intensive speculation until you have tried the other avenues and roads," said Phillip, swinging the six-cylinder through a cañon of packing-cases with the perfection of an artist.

"Just what do you mean by that?"

There was a bit of straight going.

"The French," said Phillip oratorically, "the French have an interesting method of gunning. When they wish to actuate what some call the strangle-hold, some the kibosh, and others a 'barrage' on a particular sector of German line, they put a perfect circle of shell-fire round it. Thus, cut off from the fellowship of man, the stalwarts in that curtained circle run out of food, ammunition, and men.

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That sector is isolated, weakened. It can be dealt with by concentrated forces at a given time, while no help can come through the curtain of shell-fire."

"What part does my car play in this parable?"

"Call it Exhibit A in the processes of 'barage.' Here are we, the only people who have this valuable bit of paper bequeathed by Brandt. So far as they can see, the whole secret of that paper is known only to people within a circle drawn—roughly—round these works. They have probably taken steps to lock us in that circle. The car, however, is a means of breaking that lock. They can watch trains, roads, make difficulties, and all that outside the ring. With the car, we can break out with a rush and get clear before they can grab us. To put the car out of action is to render us less dangerous and elusive."

They had pulled up at the office door—a door happily situated out of sight of the factory gates. The young men got out of the car.

"I see," said Thorold gravely. "And you

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think that we cannot get away to Thorpwoold by other means—or rather, it would be difficult. We are, in fact, cut off from the world, pinned down here by—”

“By a sort of moral barrage. I won’t stake half my kingdom on it, but I am willing to admit that I am probably right. Heinrich, the spy, would not be himself if he had not done his best to get us noosed.”

They were upstairs, near Thorold’s private room, by now.

“Very well; you think that,” said Thorold, with a note of triumph in his voice. “I am now about to prove that Heinrich the barrage expert is a human and fallible creature like the rest of us.”

“Father always said to me,” said Phillip chattily, “when troubles beset thee, little son, go at once to Thorold, the youth with the nimble wits. Thorold will snatch you out of the burning. Thorold will—”

“I’m not jossing,” said Thorold; “I’m banking on facts. There’s one sure way out of your circle of moral shell-fire—one means that you have overlooked.”

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"Go ahead; point out the way to freedom, success, and safety."

Thorold opened the door of his office. His hand waved victoriously towards his desk.

"I could telephone for a car. You overlook that—the telephone."

"Ah," sighed Phillip.

"The telephone," said Thorold; "that would break through your barrage."

Cicely rose from a chair and came forward.

"What was it you said about the telephone?" she asked.

"Nothing pressing," answered Thorold. "Phillip was building mountains out of theories. I just removed his mountains with—the telephone. I said that at a critical moment we would call up aid on the telephone . . ."

"But you can't," cried Cicely.

Phillip grinned.

"I can't?" said the slightly crestfallen Thorold.

"No. Something has gone wrong with your telephone. I tried to use it myself—but I can't get connected. Your clerks say that they can

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get no connection. The line is broken somewhere."

"Dear Heinrich doesn't seem to have overlooked much," said Phillip.

"I begin to grasp that this isn't a game that can be played amateurishly," said Thorold, standing in the middle of his office, while he put on a great motor coat. "We'll need all our wits; we mustn't neglect a single detail. And we must act without the slightest hesitation."

"I remember mentioning somewhere that it was a 'rush business,'" interpolated Phillip.

Cicely said surprisingly, "No; we mustn't wait a minute—not a minute."

Thorold turned on her.

"We," he said lamely. "Meaning Phillip and myself, of course."

"And me," said Nurse Cicely.

She had a lovely colour, a high colour of adventure, in her sparkling cheeks; but her prettiness did not allow them to miss her resolution. Phillip said nothing. Thorold would, he knew. Thorold still had archaic and sentimental ideas about women. Thorold opened his mouth to deliver himself of rosy, Victorian

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sentiments about women and their need to leave danger and action to men. Thorold did not speak. Cicely spoke.

“Your car is at the door, isn’t it? I heard it drive up, so I know that you have settled the matter of Johnson. And, of course, you will tell me all about it presently—I want to hear so much.” It was just woman—any sort of woman, Victorian or otherwise, for sex is beautiful and eternal—that flashed a bewildering, a breath-taking glance of reliance and admiration on Thorold. But, all the same, sex wasn’t going to miss sport. “I can’t hear about it now, naturally. Isn’t it hurry, hurry, hurry all the time, if we are to beat these men? We must start and find the secret of Brandt’s house at once—you have an overcoat in the car for me, perhaps, Mr. Thorold?”

Thorold’s mouth opened mid-Victorianly, though his twentieth-century eyes sparkled at the thought of her courage, and the thought, too, that she and her fine, bright spirit were to come with them. He said, haltingly—

“I have such a coat; but—ah—is it quite the sort—”

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She flashed a look, as though she were hearing the voice of some unexpected reawakened and tedious great-grandmother.

"Please—please," she cried in her quick way. "You really are not going to refer to lily-type women in these days of the century. Don't let us waste time over stupid stupendities on Women's Spheres of Influence. Those things don't matter at all now. The thing that matters is what a woman makes up her mind to do. I've made up my mind to come. Why do you think I wanted to use your telephone? I was trying to ring up the hospital to tell them I wouldn't be back to-night—and they were not to expect me until they saw me. I can't get on to them, but I can't help that. They must just worry until I'm back. Meanwhile, we'll go on to Thorpwold now. Come on."

Thorold looked at Cicely for a minute.

"By Jove!" he breathed. "Rather!—to Thorpwold, with you. . . . Come on."

They followed through the door towards the stairs and the car. Phillip, of course, had already started.

CHAPTER VII

THEY grouped themselves by the car, and Cudd; instinctively they all looked towards Phillip. The strategy of the affair was obviously in no other hands but Phillip's.

Phillip for a moment stood pensive and detached. Thorold, after getting out a leather coat for Nurse Cicely, turned to the Lieutenant of Staff, and asked—

“You'll drive, of course, Phillip?”

Phillip glanced at them amiably.

“We'll have a little flavouring of Higher Command here,” he said. “Cudd to the control gear.”

Cudd, who had been a chauffeur—a man before whom the great ones of the earth were humble—was now the “matloe” again. He nipped into the steering-seat as though he had been piped to “Action Stations.” It could be seen that Phillip had a real regard for Cudd. He nodded appreciation.

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"Cudd," he said, "you and I are going to be the moral stiffening of this civilian crush. Do you know the road to Thorpwold?"

"With me eyes shut," commented Cudd, with just a touch of the chauffeur in his voice.

"Do you know a road that appears to go anywhere but to Thorpwold, but which, strangely and mysteriously, ultimately arrives at Thorpwold?"

"Doubling on our tracks, so to speak?"

"Oh, very much," said Phillip.

"Leave it to me, Sir," said Cudd sturdily. "I'll cod 'em. Them coves'll think we've gone straight to Crewe." ("But do you feel that sane people would think anyone would want to go to Crewe?" asked Phillip, *sotto voce*.) "They'll think we've gone right on to Crewe—an' I'll 'ave us in Thorpwold in under a nour-an-'arf."

"You bite very quickly and surely, Cudd," said Phillip approvingly. "And, if they do not think we are fit people to go to Crewe or anywhere else, you'll ignore them?"

"Even if I muck up this 'ere car, I'll go over the blighters," said Cudd confidentially.

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"Them blighters won't stop me. Nobody will—only on your orders, sir, leastways."

"You have the right Roman stuff in you, Cudd," said Phillip. "You've got *your* part all right. You carry on until father says stop. Good!"

Phillip turned to Thorold. Thorold had put Cicely into the tonneau of the car. He was prepared to share it with her. He asked—

"Are you coming behind, or—?"

"No, Jimmy," said Phillip with dignity. "I am not, neither are you"—he chuckled when he saw Thorold's face fall—"yet," he ended.

"Oh," said Thorold with relief. And then, "Silly devil, Phillip. What now?"

Phillip took off his cap and his Sam Browne and put them in the rear of the car.

"We do some Brass Hattery," he said.

"Do the regulations allow you to appear in the street without those?" asked Thorold, referring to the cap and Sam Browne.

"That is the Brass Hattery—Higher Thought in tactics, y'know." He spoke to Cudd: "When Mr. Thorold waves his hand, start her going, Cudd. Pick up Mr. Thorold,

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then me. But don't drop speed. Come along, Jimmy."

At the corner of the office block he halted the bewildered chemist.

"Here's your post. You can see the gate. I am strolling innocently, and without a thought of anything in the world, to the gate. When I take out my cigarette-case, wave Cudd on. When you embark, leave the door well open for me. With my sick leg I want all the room to come aboard. Also, Cudd must have opened out to a good pace by then. Cigarette-case—don't forget."

Phillip strolled languidly to the factory gates. He was—capless and without harness—a casual idler who had come out to the gates, and no further, for a breath of fresh air. The grubby gentleman who was leaning against the opposite wall, while he followed the purely British industry of reading an evening paper, seemed to think this was Phillip's rôle. He looked stubbornly at Phillip, waved his paper with a sort of idle disgust of the military, and settled down to read again.

Phillip yawned a little. And his mind was

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not yawning. As the idler waved his rag, the officer's quick eyes took in the whole of the not very highly romantic scene. The salient object of the scene was a great pair-horse lorry, whose high-pitched driver half-dozed as he waited over the reins.

A very ordinary-looking lorry. A very gritty and usual looking driver.

But not quite.

The casual wave of the evening paper had a sort of magic for that driver. When Phillip had appeared at the gate, he seemed to have briskened up at so comely a sight. At the wave of the paper, he resumed his air of semi-somnolence. Phillip looked at the lorry; casually he gauged the road-space on the off-side of the lorry. He almost yawned again. He strolled over to one side of the gate, taking a stand which would force Cudd to hug the curb away from the lorry . . . and he took out his cigarette-case.

Beautiful car, that Napier. It did its work with so little fuss and noise. It was out of the gate before the idler realised that the active life was the life for him, before he had the

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wits to throw down his evening paper. It was well out before the lorry-driver saw the paper fall—that is, before he had time to wrench wildly on his reins. Phillip was in the car, and the car was by the lorry just at that moment when the two great horses began to do mad, Morris-dancing things athwart the road.

Phillip reached for his cap and Sam Browne.

“That,” he said, “was all done for our benefit”—“that” was a jerk of the head backwards.

Looking backwards, they saw the performing lorry at the zenith of its “turn.” It was slewed right across the road. One horse was down and kicking, one horse was up and kicking. Packing-cases were falling off the lorry as the autumn leaves fall off the trees.

“Phew!” breathed Thorold. “That would have blocked us very neatly.”

“Or smashed us very completely,” annotated Phillip. “Not amateurs at this sort of thing, are they—though we *are* through their first barrage.”

The big car, going with its silken rush

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through the low, bleak country of the district, ate up the miles with its splendid and unhesitant ease. They were heading, apparently, straight away from Thorpwold, but they knew that presently Cudd the crafty would swing off northward, then, twisting back, would bring them, by little roads across the marshes and the dykes, to the small seaside town.

It was five o'clock in the evening—a golden day, rich and vivid with summer. At the pace they were going, and upon Cudd's calculations, they would be into Thorpwold long before darkness fell. That, though it would be good for them to see things, including Brandt's house, also, as Thorold pointed out, would enable them to be seen by those who knew that Brandt had lived there, and had reason for keeping Brandt's home under their eyes.

"And they will certainly have got a message through—somehow."

"Have you got a local map?" asked Phillip.

"Oh, only in the holder by the steering-wheel."

Phillip stood up and leaned over the chauff-

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feur. "Ease up a bit, Cudd," he called. "I want that map—you know the road?"

The chauffeur nodded as he handed over the map-case. "Foller it in me sleep," he said.

Phillip took the map. He sat down and examined it. Thorold, who might have examined it too, examined Nurse Cicely. Curiously, he suddenly recalled all Nurse Cicely had gone through.

"You're not feeling the strain, Miss Bais-tain?" he asked.

The Nurse's chin came up with a delicious and defiant little movement. She was certainly comely. The quickness, the vivacity, the fire and colour of her set his heart a-glowing.

"Strain?" she cried. "No, I am as alive as electricity. There is something swinging, exhilarating in all this that seems to keep me moving sumptuously on air. I'm enormously excited and keen; I could storm fortresses, kill Germans, or run for miles. I feel large, powerful, and exultant—not a hint of strain."

"You look exceedingly irresistible," said Thorold, and only half of that was banter. "And you have carried through your part

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splendidly. You've been astonishingly plucky, Nurse."

"If I have," said Nurse Cicely, blushing gloriously at his words, "if I have, it's because I didn't think about being plucky. It all seemed part of the everyday life. It didn't occur to me that anything out of the routine was happening. The outstanding sensation was ordinariness."

"Always is," came from Phillip over the map. "V.C.'s are a race of people who spend their days wondering why in Hades people are making a fuss. But it's pluck all the same."

"Eh?" cried Thorold, half-hearing.

"Don't mind me," said Phillip, without looking up. "I was only putting in an annotation."

"It wasn't dramatic," said Cicely, who had blushed again as Phillip spoke, for the indolent and dazzling young Lieutenant had the habit of touching right home with his apparently casual remarks. "It wasn't dramatic—at times it was even uncomfortable. This, on the other hand, is supremely dramatic; and I

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don't mind if I am to be uncomfortable. I'm enjoying it—immensely.”

Thorold nodded.

“Yes,” he admitted. “It has caught hold of me, blown me right away with a sort of whirlwind recklessness. It fills me with an exultance too. Isn't that strange? I'm one of the plodders, the dry-as-dusters. I'm really sedentary all through—a creature of books and retorts, of midnight oil, of orderly laboratories, of routine. I've lived peacefully housed in a life from which all stress and excitement has been carefully abstracted—yet here am I rushing about like a John Buchan hero, and revelling in it.”

“But that's the reason,” cried Cicely. “When the quiet-living and the sedentary take to action, they are gluttons for thrills. The dam is loosed, and out comes our conserved intensity with an enormous gush. Myself—I come from a comfortable family in which the daughters do nothing with unparalleled fervour all day long. There is so much comfort, surety, and affluence about us that we are simply suffocated with ease. We live lives of

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crushing usualness. Certainly, the hospital training and nursing relieved some of *my* feelings; but, either because the hospital was merely an escape into another routine or because I have an overcharge of feeling, I was never really carried out of myself; but this—”

“Don’t you think of the dangers?”

“Very much. Underneath, I can be very scared. But that’s part of it all—perhaps, indeed, it is the spice of it, the thing that makes it different. I feel like a child daring life. I want to see how far I can go, as it were, before anything happens. But, in spite of happenings, I know I’ve got to go as far as I can.”

“I think—” said Phillip.

“I have the same feeling,” said Thorold, ignoring Phillip. “It is curious. Perhaps everybody has. The real courage, after all, is not to be ignorant of fear, but to know fear and yet to go on.”

“I think—” said Phillip.

“That’s it—it is as though I were funky with my legs, but determined to fight someone with my arms and brain,” said Cicely.

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"Or it's like leaving your body to wriggle and cringe and die on the ground, while one goes forward fighting and winning with the soul," said Phillip.

"Good—that's it!" cried Thorold enthusiastically.

Phillip smiled.

"Oh, well, I'm glad to have contributed my bit to the metaphysics of fear. What I really want to attract your attention to is this little map I have in my hand and the small Staff plan I have in my head."

CHAPTER VIII

PHILLIP spread the map before them. "Paragraph No. 1," he began: "We take it for granted that to arrive with pomp and circumstance, and this beautiful but recognisable car into the heart of Thorpwold, is asking for trouble right away.

"Two: Accepting the aforesaid, we must make our entry by stealth, and without (seeming) guile.

"Three: The best mode, method, or form to do this (see Paragraphs 1 and 2) is to leave our car at some spot conveniently covered and reasonably remote from attention and harm, and so to proceed into Thorpwold on foot and examine the lay of the land and the house of Brandt.

"With all these points in mind, we next turn to the map to find, if possible, our strategic base. Thanks to the acumen of our able Staff, such a point has been found." Phillip put his

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finger on the map. They saw he was pointing at a spot which seemed remote from the gathering of black maggots which stood for Thorpwold village.

Thorold said—

“Rather a distance.”

“Under a mile, as the adventurers will walk. I’ll show you that in a minute.”

“I was trying to say, it seems a little bit out of touch. No direct road to Thorpwold. No good road, even, to get to it from this direction. Seems to me to be so awkwardly placed, for what we are to do. It may hamper speed and action.” Phillip looked at him, smiling and inscrutable. “Only my opinion, of course, Phillip. I offer it to help things.”

“A very valuable opinion, Jimmy,” answered Phillip. “It is the type of opinion I would have wanted if I’d been asked to choose. You’ve outlined the pre-eminent virtues of that little place with a most acute touch.”

“Not the virtues—faults.”

“War is a great reversing gear,” said the bright Lieutenant. “It turns things upside

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down. Peace hath her virtues, and war changes 'em to crimes. Awkwardness, that was your fundamental argument. It is mine. Awkwardness, that is the virtue which gives my jolly little base its strategic value."

He drew their attention to the map.

"Consider," he said. "This spot is, as you say, off all reasonable and homely lines of route, it is thoroughly out of the way. That's the point. It is so out of the way that it should be out of the reckoning. Q.E.D. There is little chance of our friends, the Germans *sub rosa*, thinking we will go there. Need I tell you that they will watch the reputable motor roads, and they will watch for a car on those roads?"

"Now; your plea, no roads to (or from) Thorpwold. Good point that. Nothing to watch, as has been aforesaid. For that reason there will be less danger of their patrols surprising our car and Cudd when we are away from it. True, as you are going to say, Jimmy, that fact will hamper us if we have to get away quickly . . ."

Phillip looked at the chemist.

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"Yes, I was going to say that," agreed Thorold.

"It is a point," commented Phillip. "It is our duty, as it was Napoleon's, to prepare for retreat. But even this will help. At a given hour, and after dark, Cudd will bring the six-cylinder carefully round by this detour." He indicated a clear, but secondary road on the map. "This going will probably be abominable, but, from the nature of things, he should arrive at a point where he will be able not only to get on to the main road and away with ease, but should get there without attention from the Boches. Night and a by-road, those should help. That is the tactical point where he will wait, by that barn, on the outskirts of the village. That, also, will be our rendezvous when we leave Brandt's house.

"That's the rôle of the motor. Now ours. You will see by those little woolly things, and the shading, that the car will halt in a little coppice. Again, you will note from the contour figures, that the cutting is made through one of the highest points in this rather plain and homely district. Anyhow, it is the highest

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point to serve us. As I judge, Cudd can leave the car on the road, and, by climbing to the top of the cutting, will be both able to keep an eye on the Napier and an eye on these two field-paths. *We* enter Thorpwold by these field-paths. You and Miss Baistain following this one. I following this, which is shorter."

Thorold interrupted. Phillip, in fact, had already raised his head and looked towards Thorold.

"But, Phillip, my dear man, surely not Miss Baistain. I mean, for her to go into Thorpwold—"

"I am going into Thorpwold," said Nurse Cicely resolutely.

"My dear Miss Cicely, there may be real danger—"

"I am going into Thorpwold, danger or none," said Nurse Cicely defiantly. Phillip smiled.

"Also, Jimmy," he said, with eyes twinkling, "I want to use Miss Baistain—if I am in command!"

"Oh—but—"

"Of course you are in command," said

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Nurse Cicely. "We are here just to obey you"—she flashed a resolute look at Thorold—"to obey you without questioning."

"Oh—oh, very well," said Thorold doggedly.

"You and Miss Baistain will follow this field-path, to this hill," said Phillip. "From this hill—where the path touches it—to Cudd's cutting is a direct line of vision, as you will see by the map. Cudd will be able to watch it. The hill is Miss Baistain's post."

"My post!" burst out Nurse Cicely. "You mean, I have to remain *there*?"

"I need you there," said Phillip meekly.

"It's absurd. It's a trick to keep me out of things."

"We're here just to obey Phillip—without questioning," said Thorold decisively.

"Oh!" said Nurse Baistain, and she succumbed.

Phillip continued—he did not let the Nurse see he was smiling—"Miss Baistain will have the paper on her—the contents of which, by the way, we will carry in our memories only. If she sees anybody suspicious coming towards

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her she must hide in this rather uncomfortable ditch, marked under these trees. Otherwise, she will take up her position under cover of those same trees, and, unobserved, will watch the field-path to Thorpwold. If, unfortunately, one of us does not appear by 8.30—which will be the limit of the daylight—she must go back to Cudd, and then off to the local H.Q. as quickly as she can.”

“As bad as that?” said Thorold, with a thrill.

“Can’t take risks,” said Phillip. “It will mean that something will have happened to us. And we must leave the local H.Q. to finish the job as quickly and as well as they can, from that moment. You won’t have a cushy or polite time with that H.Q., I’m afraid, Miss Baistain.”

Nurse Cicely tossed her head prettily.

“And if nothing has happened?” she said, and her voice thrilled, too.

“One of us will come out of the village to you. You will wave your handkerchief—or Thorold’s, that is larger—to Cudd to show that all is well. You will receive his answer-

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ing signal (handkerchief again). Then come on into the village. You will certainly want something to eat, and there may also be plans to discuss. After that, you go off to the rendezvous and wait with Cudd. We do what is to be done in the murder of Brandt's house."

"I don't want to rendezvous—I want to come to the house."

"Orders," said Thorold. "Also, it will be no place . . ."

Phillip the diplomat spoke. It is not always wise constantly to remind the twentieth-century woman that she is, in spite of all, just feminine.

"Miss Baistain, you will be more careful in not coming into the house. You will, for one thing, keep the paper intact, whatever befalls. For another, you will represent our second move to checkmate the Boche. If we do not turn up by the morning—again you must go at top speed to the local H.Q. We *must* spread out our forces."

Nurse Cicely sat in rueful silence. Phillip rose, bent over Cudd, and explained the new route to the cutting in the coppice.

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The great car was into vague and vile side-roads now. The occupants were lifting and jolting curiously, but not painfully, on the beautifully balanced springs.

"There is, of course, the house itself to think of," said Thorold. "We have taken it rather for granted, but can we? How are we going to get into it?"

"If you've made up your mind to get into a house," said Phillip, "you always do it somehow. That isn't super-man philosophy, but good, sound, burgling rule-o'-thumb. We mean to get into Brandt's house. Leave it at that."

"Then the house itself. I suppose you've realised that it must have been damaged by the bombs?"

"I have had it in mind."

"But how much damaged?"

"Not my day for riddles," said Phillip.

"It might be a complete ruin."

"Might be—that's the risk. But perhaps it'll be demi-ruin only. The moral and material effect of bombs is about two storeys deep. A small house might be considerably hurt.

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From my own intensive knowledge, I should say that the house might be very scurvily knocked about, but not enough to keep us out. Also, these catacombs . . .”

“Ah, the catacombs—let’s hear about them again.” (Phillip, of course, had decoded the whole of Brandt’s paper to them.) Nurse Cicely, who was keeping the little packet in a safe and feminine place, produced and unfolded the paper. She handed it over to Phillip.

“No,” said Phillip; “we will take our memory for a trial run. You read as I recite. Pull me up if I go off the track.”

“I’m ready,” said Nurse Cicely.

Phillip began, without the slightest hesitation: “‘Entrance to catacombs, No. 7, East Street, Thorpwold. Go to large pantry on left of scullery-door (passing through house). At back of pantry, under entire length of bottom shelf, is a large cupboard, used as wood-cupboard. Remove wood inside. One of the pieces of wood will remain fixed to floor. Pull on that very strongly. This will release catch. Floor of cupboard will fall away. Steps lead

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down from here into catacombs. In chamber at foot of steps, there are three branching passages. Take left. Thirty paces down, turn to left (not to right—right is a blind passage). Fifteen paces turn to left (not to right). Fifteen paces along the passage turns at a sharp left angle. (There is a niche in this wall for a lamp if necessary.) Stop. Kick powerfully at bottom of angle wall. If the kick is strong, the floor will spring open downwards. Beneath is a very small chamber, with shelves. In the red box on the second shelf are the particulars, plans, etc., of the cache. Pantry-flap and floor-flap are fitted on underside with opening levers and bolts to secure.' How's that?" asked Phillip.

"You have a very good memory," said Nurse Cicely.

The car stopped with a jolt.

"The cutting, Sir," said Cudd.

They looked up and they were under trees and between high banks, even as Phillip had planned. They alighted.

Whatever Cudd—the lad who liked a quiet life, and wasn't averse to adventure—thought

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about his reserve position, he was too well trained a man to protest. He received his instructions without comment. Perhaps Nurse Cicely took her cue in discipline from him. They went across the field-paths, and she took her place according to schedule, without mentioning the topic of disappointment. Though she caught Thorold's hand, as he left her, and her eyes. . . . But that had nothing to do with the business of Brandt's house.

Thorold got into Thorpwold first. He walked calmly along through an heroically deserted main street, and presently, without asking, found the small, homely turning that was East Street. He began to look at numbers of the bucolic, but slightly overgrown, flint cottages that made the street, but almost at once he saw that he would not have to hunt far for No. 7. The Zepp. bomb had made No. 7 a most distinctive thing.

It was a pretty bad wreck, but, as Phillip had said, it was not an "altogether" wreck.

The front of the house had been terribly mauled. The rear walls, and the rear rooms,

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had come off in the curious, scathless way of rooms that encounter high-explosive.

There were pictures on the walls, that is, on the flimsy lathe partition that separated the back from the front rooms. Through a large gap in such a wall on the first floor, Thorold could see a bed, and a chest of drawers, and a chair with clothes on it—all intact, as though they had been put there as an exhibit of bedroom furniture.

He could not see anything of the ground floor. A slightly implacable boarding had been put up. The gate of the boarding was locked. Before that gate was a middle-aged, amiable, but earnest constable.

Thorold hesitated. The constable caught the chemist's eye, and the constable was friendly.

"Nasty smash," said Thorold, by way of a start. And the constable was off.

You would have said that that constable had been just pining his life away because he could not tell the whole dramatic story to sympathetic ears. That was the effect. It all came out with an unceasing and copious flow. Thor-

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old listened, and wondered what he should do, or what he might do. As he listened, he saw Phillip stroll negligently into view at the end of the street. His heart lightened. Phillip the solver of difficulties would solve this one. Phillip just as negligently strolled away from the end of the street. He disappeared.

Thorold was put out. What was Phillip up to? Phillip was not only leaving him in the lurch, he was leaving him to a bore. The constable churned the horrid details out.

"When we coom up it was a horrible muck. Burnin' a bit, you know, Sir. All mucky like, too, you know, Sir. But there was 'uman beings in it, Sir. We 'ad to get them out. No thinking about ourselves, then, Sir, you know. We 'ad to rescoo them 'uman beings."

Thorold shifted under torture. He turned slightly. He saw Phillip. Phillip was coming from the other end of the little street. He had passed up a road behind the ruin, had come through a field-bordered path at the top of East Street, and was now approaching them

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from the remote end. He came up casually.

"Hullo, Jimmy. Been looking for you. I'm really hungry, you know."

The constable saluted the uniform.

"Genman looking at my bombed 'ouse, Sir," he volunteered garrulously.

"So I see," said Phillip, showing a spark of interest. "And, by Jove! it seems to have got it rotten bad."

"Very rotten bad, Sir," admitted the constable.

"And the ground floor—bad?"

This was the cue for the constable to lead the man in khaki to view the rotten bad ground-floor. The constable led not. He said, merely—

"Mucky, Sir—orful!"

Phillip was a little more interested.

"Indeed," he said. "That's very interesting. It'd be worth seeing—do you think?"

"Sorry, Sir," said the constable, sympathetic but firm.

"Eh!" said Phillip in mild surprise.

"Orders, Sir. No admittance, Sir. Nobody on no account."

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"But—" Phillip with a glance indicated his own uniform.

"But, it's usual to allow soldiers—"

"I know, Sir. But it's forbid now. Them's the orders. Nobody on no account. Not even the milingtary."

"The local Commander's orders, eh? Where is the depôt—? I could get a permit, perhaps?"

"No, Sir. No depôt, Sir. In enycase, this was an order from a norficer superior to depôts. An 'E was mighty 'ot about it." A wave of indignation swept over Robert the Blue. "Seemed to think I *liked* people looking over the ruddy 'ouse."

"A commanding officer?"

"No, sir; Staff-orficer."

"Eh?" said Phillip quickly, opening the collar of his great-coat. "I'm a Staff Officer, too."

"I see, Sir. But this was a Major, Sir. A large Staff-Major, Sir."

"Ah!" said Phillip, suddenly seeing light. "A Staff-Major; perhaps he is staying here?"

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"No, Sir, he ain't. Come and went in a car, 'e did. I'm sorry, Sir," pleaded the constable.

"Not at all," said Phillip. **"You've done quite rightly, my man. Come along, Jimmy. Don't corrupt the law—and I'm very hungry."**

CHAPTER IX

PHILLIP drew Thorold back—not towards the main-street end of East Street, but towards the field-bordered path. They walked along this muddy path until they came to the road Phillip must have turned up.

It was no more than a straggly little lane. The gardens of the East Street houses came down to the gravel beds that made its pavement. On the other side there was a hedge, some morbid-looking trees, one or two timid and retiring cottages.

“Examine carefully,” said Phillip, keeping Thorold in the cover of a bush. “This is our line of approach—for to-night. Note that the gardens have seven-foot flint walls. The door leading through the stone wall of No. 7 is rather resolutely barred—I spent ten seconds in testing it as I passed. The garden door of No. 5—that is next to No. 7, as you may have deduced—is neither barred nor locked. Also,

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it cannot be bolted or otherwise rendered impregnable. That, too, I have noted. Burglars would never waste their time on the heirlooms of 5, East Street, and the owner of No. 5, wise man, has not idly spent his cash on preventatives. In his garden is a very inferior fruit-tree, which will make a very superior ladder. Fix all these things in your head."

"I've done that," said Thorold.

"Good," said Phillip. "Remember, your next visit will be in moonlight—or rather, first-quarter moonlight. Now turn slightly north. I will give you compass directions. Over there, where those trees are, you will see underneath a most deplorable structure. Observe not its leering roof, but its white wall. That is the barn. That is the point of rendezvous to-night after we have visited Brandt's house. Can you keep the line of direction in your head?"

"Yes," said Thorold.

"Good. You pass three trees on your right. A small haystack on right. Then the trees over the barn should loom in front. Turn again, Jimmy."

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They faced the fields behind Thorpwold.

"By trespassing in a line due south-west," said Phillip, "you will reach the field-path that brought you in. It'll be the second—mine is the first. I think, perhaps, you will prefer to bring Miss Cicely in to tea."

"Philip—!" began Thorold.

"Not pure generosity on my part," said the young man. "I have large things to do—mainly in the 'look-see' line. There is a neat inn at the other end of Thorpwold."

"I saw that—my path came out near it."

"That is the one we won't go into," drawled Phillip. "There is, on the other side, on the other hand, a little tea-garden on this side of the High Street (a few doors lower than the inn) which can be entered from the fields. You can't miss it—there's a potty little notice stuck on the end of a pole near its crazy gate. You might enter that tea-garden by that gate—we won't be seen then. I shall be in the house ordering tea and collecting my thoughts. . . . Don't forget that a handkerchief must be waved to Cudd, as a sign that he starts at nightfall to meet us by the barn. . . ."

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Perhaps Nurse Cicely and Thorold were a little later coming to tea than might have been expected. There are certain phases of youth in which hunger does not appear to be the important thing people think it. In any case, Phillip did not seem to mind. In any case, they had plenty of time to wait before night came.

"We took cover all the way," said Cicely, who had the brightest of colours when they came through the gardens into the house.

"It's wise to think of every detail," said Phillip gravely, but with amused eyes. "I can see that Jimmy took cover thoroughly, as is his wont. He has been sitting in it."

There were wisps of hay on Jimmy's coat. There was a most amiable haystack on the field-path.

Thorold said desperately, "Ah, that must have been when we saw that man."

Phillip wrinkled his nose, looked at the tea-cups, and said nothing. He didn't think that Jimmy had seen very much of man, though, of course, Miss Cicely might have kept her eyes on one.

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Miss Cicely asked, "And you, Mr. Phillip—is there anything fresh?"

"Tea," said Phillip. "A most adequate quantity of tea. Also eggs and some ham; fish-paste; watercress and lettuce, for those who have the fruit bulge; jam—not plum-and-apple; corned beef, if you want it; fried fish, if you ache for it . . . a jolly tea—a large tea." He smiled at Miss Cicely, and rang a bell.

Cicely saw that this was the moment for discussing tea—not plans.

It was really a jolly tea. Phillip talked of George Robey, and Harold, the Subaltern who wanted to know of things it wasn't really necessary to know, of revues, and songs and things. Phillip had a way. Phillip, who looked a shining and miraculous uniform, and no more, was everything else. Cicely, who glanced at him a good deal when she was not looking at Thorold, said to him, "You're rather unexpected, Mr. Phillip."

"I am nearly always unexpected," said Phillip. "Visitors to H.Q. look at me, and sniff, and say in altitudinous tones, 'Now,

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please let me see a real officer.' One look at me convinces the world that, as a decoration, I am in a good class, but as a soldier my brain won't let me."

Nurse Cicely laughed.

"Why mislead the world?"

"Part of my charm," said Phillip. "When folk and Majors find that I sometimes act with a dim sense of intelligence they are so pleased that they go about like beaming anthropologists who have personally discovered a new race. They make, as it were, a solemn joy of the thing. They buttonhole Commanders-in-Chief, saying confidentially, 'You are wrong about this lad Phillip; his cerebellum is not unmitigated wood—I have discovered symptoms of real brain.' Thus everybody is pleased, and I'm happy."

"That is the funny part, now give us the serious reason," said Cicely, holding her head up deliciously, deliciously glancing at him beneath her lashes. "Why adopt the attitude of ineffable flippancy, while really underneath—"

"Thorold," cried Phillip desperately, "she

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is using the scalpel without chloroform. Rouse the anti-vivisectionists to my aid."

"No; *I'm* going to hold you down when you wriggle," said Jimmy. "I'm interested too."

Phillip put up his hands.

"*Kamarad*," he wailed.

"Now," said Cicely smiling. "Give us the real reason of *you*." Phillip sat back.

"You have hit it," he answered smiling. "The real reason of me is me. I am built like—me. I cannot help me. Clothes, and my bright morning face, and my healthy egoism—all that comes to me without my troubling."

He stopped. Cicely looked at him. He went on, rueful, protesting, answering Cicely's look.

"And I rather like it; oh, yes. Also, it is not without good, sturdy values. You see, a man who looks a chump can do things that men of a hefty Von Bismarck-Haig school can't do. The fool walks in where the angels merely cry, 'Baffled!' to the Yale lock."

"But you are anything but a fool," said Cicely.

"There's no knowing," said Phillip—"for-

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unately, too, the world has adopted a universal habit of judging by appearances, in spite of proverbs."

He looked at his wrist-watch.

"We want some more hot water," he said inanely. Cicely reached out for the bell, Phillip was there first. He smiled. Lifted the jug, and with jug and bell went to the door. They were in the front room on the ground floor. Phillip looked along the passage, and up the stairs, glanced in through the open door of the back room. He stood and listened. Presently he rang the bell.

The circumferent young married woman who came from the kitchen in answer, was surprised to see him in the passage, jug in hand.

"I *am* sorry, Sir," she cried, smiling, as women did, at Philip. "I didn't 'ear you ring first time."

"Oh, that's all right," said Phillip amiably. "You were busy, probably."

"Yessir, an' it's a long way to the kichun, and you don't not always 'ear—"

"That's all right," smiled Phillip.

"An' me being alone in th' 'ouse, like, makes

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it awkward," said the woman. She said more, both when she took the jug and brought it back full. But what has been put down here, was obviously the thing that counted. As Phillip came back, Cicely smiled at him, and he smiled back at her. It was certain that Cicely was thinking Phillip was anything but a fool. It was certain that Phillip knew what Cicely was thinking. Both knew how Phillip had found out he would not be overheard.

Phillip poured water into the pot, leaned back, and looked at them.

"It will thrill you to know that the Confraternity of Boche is here, on the spot, and alert," he offered.

"That was to be expected," said Cicely. "Some of the Confraternity never left this place, probably. They were here with Brandt, watching him and his house." She smiled at Phillip: "No, you didn't bring off *that* thrill," she seemed to smile.

"Do they know we're here, do you think?" asked Thorold, more to the point.

"They do not know, but they are expecting us."

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"How are you so certain?" This from Thorold.

"Mayn't I be certain?" asked Phillip of Cicely. Cicely laughed outright.

"You're too acute—too penetrating, Phillip—Mr.—"

"Oh, please, merely Phillip."

Thorold was a little perplexed.

"I don't quite understand this part, both of you. Why is Phillip acute and penetrating—?"

"Only—well, when Phillip says a thing definitely—when he is 'so certain,' it is because he knows definitely and certainly," said Cicely.

"Ah, and you—you and not I—have been able to find that out already. You have penetration as well as Phillip."

Thorold flushed a little at being left, and Cicely gave him a smile. A different smile from the one Phillip gained, a smile much warmer. Phillip would have willingly exchanged smiles.

Thorold was not put out, his nature was too fine.

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“Well, you are certain, Phillip—explain to the ignorant.”

“Little to explain,” protested Phillip. “As I came in from my field-path, I noticed an undistinguished man sitting on a wall, and employing his hours as do the lilies of the field. I noticed his wall was a top-hole observation-post. He could watch the forks of the two roads that enter Thorpwold from this side—the coast road, and the road from inland. It seemed to me that possibly he was not as idle as he looked.

“He saw me; he saw, at least, by cap and slacks, I was a khaki man. I wondered whether he would know what I stood for. I was alert for signs of human acuteness. But I think his soul was concentrated on the blessed words ‘motor-car’; with three people in same, one female; also chauffeur. His casual glance slid off me, and returned to the roads. Of course, he may have notched me for report.”

“Could he have seen me?” asked Thorold.

“No; you entered the High Street round the bend. I don’t know whether there was anybody else on the look-out. I didn’t see

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signs, but that's not proof. Anyhow, when I came in here to tea, I examined the landscape from this window. The wall of observation is easily seen from this window. The lotus-eater was still upon it, gazing dreamily at this road.

"I was rather glad that we all were to come in by the back gate. I was, if you don't really mind, not terribly hurt when I found your coming was a little delayed. I occupied the time with sleuthery from behind Nottingham lace curtains. It was instructive. Ten minutes before you came, another husky fellow, without a care or a job in the world, loitered up. Both lads talked a little (I would have given a new tunic of my own design to hear what they said), then the watcher on the wall went home to tea. And the relief patrol took his place. He's still there."

Phillip offered cigarettes.

"And that's all," he said. "From the signs, I am certain—and I think you will be—they are *still* expecting a party in a 30-35, torpedo-bodied Napier."

"As Miss Cicely said," put Thorold, "it

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was all to be expected. It alters nothing, does it? We go on. We go to the back of East Street to-night. Miss Cicely goes on to the rendezvous—we go over the wall to our task—”

Phillip nodded. Miss Cicely flicked the ash from her cigarette into her plate. She said precisely nothing.

CHAPTER X

THE owner of No. 5, East Street, Thorp-wold, did not even keep a dog. They were up the fruit tree and over the parti-wall without so much as a cur's snarl. They crept along the garden of No. 7 in the shadow of the wall. Brandt's house, with its shattered windows, looked blind and gaunt, and skeleton in the milky-blue wash of the youngish moon.

There was a big elder tree by the wall and by the corner of the house. Its shadow was blotched and enormous on the ground, and in that shadow they waited, crouching. There was not a sound. Phillip touched the chemist, and they moved on again, no words to be spoken. On the verge of the elder's shadow, the officer dropped down on hands and knees, and went forward under the shade of some mean laurels. Thorold followed. He saw Phillip was making for the ridiculous lean-to conservatory of the house.

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It was a conservatory which had been built against the house, against the wall of the next-door house, and against the wall of the kitchen—that is, it was sunk in a recess. Thorold saw the wisdom of the line of attack. They would be in the shadow as they broke in. Also, the explosion of the bomb would have shattered all the conservatory glass. There would be some sort of protection, of course.

“Wire-netting,” Phillip whispered back. Thorold could hear the note of drawled amusement in the Lieutenant’s voice. In a second, Phillip’s hand had gone to the pocket of his great coat, had lifted from that a large and capable pair of nippers.

For a *fainéant* young man, Phillip had a workmanlike and thorough manner in the way he cut the rabbit netting. He had, as a matter of fact, learned under fire the waste of time and energy begot of hurrying wire-cutting.

It was easy to get into the conservatory, though there was a fair amount of glass on the pot shelves, and that had to be avoided as they shinned into the place. After that, the explosion proved their friend. The light doors

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leading from the back room into the conservatory had been—to all practical purposes—blown to pieces. They had merely to walk into the room.

Into the room, out into the passage—queer, that, to Thorold, for they walked into open air, where the explosion had shorn down the front of the house—then to the left, to get into the kitchen and scullery. The pantry was before them.

The pantry was, curiously, intact. A lot of plaster down from the ceiling, and that was about all. Phillip went onto his knees, opened the oblong door of the wood-cupboard under the bottom shelf, began gently, and without noise, to take out the wood.

There was not much wood left. Soon it was all out, save one piece that would not come. Phillip switched on his electric torch; caught hold of the wood, pulled.

It needed a strong pull. He had to brace himself after the first attempt, and then the billet came away.

“Eureka!” breathed Thorold.

Before their eyes the floor of the wood-cup-

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board had become black. A well of darkness yawned there. In the torch light they saw the shadow of the first step.

"We've got it," whispered Thorold excitedly. Phillip sat up swiftly. He listened. He put out the light.

"What is it?" Thorold breathed. Phillip's hand pressed his arm.

Both listened.

Something moved in the empty house. A piece of glass fell, tinkled, and shattered.

They waited. Thorold felt the kick and quiver of his knees. Phillip seemed unnaturally firm and cool. Something cheeped and scrunched, a boot had come down on a piece of glass. Thorold gulped, wished it had been Phillip's and not his pistol they had left with Cudd. Phillip relaxed. Phillip switched on the torch.

"All right," grinned Phillip. "It's Miss Cicely."

Nurse Cicely, her skirts kilted up in unfeminine but comely way, appeared in the kitchen doorway.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" she called,

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whispering. "Cicely—only Cicely." She came forward.

Thorold hissed—

"Anything wrong? Anything wrong, Miss Cicely?"

Cicely was with them in the pantry.

"I was," she breathed, and her bright eyes shone in the torchlight. "I was—I was out in the cold—" She saw the wood-cupboard. "O-oh, you've found it!"

Phillip rose, pulled the pantry door to, crowded past them to the cupboard, made himself small, went down the stairs. Cicely came next. Thorold brought up the rear.

The stairs were as narrow as the shoulder of a broad man. It was like descending into a coffin.

The chamber at the foot of the steps took the three of them, but it was a crowd. The three passages yawned before them like the deep portals of the pit of Abaddon. Phillip took the left unhesitatingly. The walls of the passage touched their shoulders as they walked. Their hair stirred sometimes as their hats touched the roof. It was all narrowly,

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almost crushingly confined, but the air was singularly good.

Phillip went first; his torch playing on the ominous walls. Cicely came second. Thorold followed, lighting the way for Cicely's feet with his torch.

They came to the divide and turned to the left. They turned to the left once more. They came to the point where the path turned at an angle. There was a niche in the wall that would take a lamp. They stopped.

The silence pressed down on them with a visible force.

They stopped. There was greater space here, because of the turn. Cicely pressed forward. Phillip checked her with his hand.

"We don't know *where* it opens," he whispered in a voice that boomed along the Stygian passages. "To go on might be risky. Thorold!"

Thorold sidled forward.

"Kick the bottom of that wall angle, and kick hard. Can't trust my gammy legs."

Thorold kicked. His kick sounded and

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echoed and re-echoed deeply and gloomily forward and back. Thorold kicked again.

Nothing happened.

Thorold kicked again.

Nothing—

“Look!” breathed Cicely. “Look—”

The floor was open. Black on the blackness of this sepulchral place was a square patch in the floor. Phillip stepped forward, and shone his torch downward.

There was a grave in the floor. A grave, an oubliette, a narrow, terrible, intimidating hole.

A hole that would barely take one grown person. But a hole with an iron ladder into it, and shelves round it. And on one of those shelves a box shining redly in the torch light.

“Thank goodness!” Thorold was saying.

“Thank goodness! Thank goodness! Thank goodness!”

Phillip dropped to the ground preparatory to descending. Cicely put her hand on his shoulder.

“Please,” she whispered. “Please.”

Phillip looked up.

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She was above him. The torch light was on her, shining and glowing on her quick and vivid face. He saw the bright emotion in her eyes. He saw the divine ardour of her lips and her cheeks, saw the thrill of her breath in her slim and fluent body.

"Please," she pleaded, "Please; this, at least, is mine. Please."

Phillip swung his feet aside. Gathering her kilted skirts tighter, Cicely went down into the pit.

In a minute she was up again, half out of the pit, leaning her elbows on the dirty ground. And Phillip was sitting, and Thorold was sitting, and the red box was open in their midst, and the quick, cool eyes of Phillip were examining paper after paper.

"Map," he whispered, opening out a square tracing. "But in cipher. It's Greek just now. Have to go over that carefully at an unexcited moment, before we can make head or tail of it." He lifted a wad of papers, clipped together. "A schedule this, should say," he said. "In cipher, too. We'll have to decode later. But easy, same old infantile code."

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"But—here's an easy word," he decoded, " 'gold.' And—and, well, I'm jiggered, gold again; 'gold' all the way. Every line, gold, gold, gold."

"Gold," cried Cicely in a thrilling whisper. "Gold—treasure."

And—

"Gold," whispered Thorold. "Gold . . . treasure."

Phillip flipped over the sheets of the schedule.

"Gold, gold, always gold. Cicely—Cicely, you have discovered to us Golconda."

His hands went feverishly through the other papers.

"Directions, that, I think—measurements in it, but code still. More directions—don't know what that one is. Or that. But this—this little one. Damee, this little one's in German!"

He brought it right under the torch.

"In German, my hat! and listen—for Heaven's sake listen to this mad and magical thing! *'Notes. This box contains map of the cache. A schedule of all the specie in gold*

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sterling (English coin) £250,000 value.'" Phillip's hand shook with excitement. *"'Of all the plate, gold and silver (£110,000 value), jewels and jewellery (£120,000 value), and other trinkets and valuables (£110,000 value, about), collected from subjects of the Empire living within English boundaries at the warning of war. Also the stock of munitions, arms, and other things, of which details are given in cipher schedules. All these things being hidden in the place detailed in cipher, for the benefit and use of the All Highest at such a time as he can take them in this war, or make use of them after the war.'"*

Phillip stopped, stared at the paper open-mouthed.

"My God! Incredible—utterly incredible, but true!"

Thorold was trembling with the maddest excitement.

"Treasure, treasure," breathed Cicely. "Wonderful, it's wonderful. I can't say anything. It's only wonderful."

"Half a million of it, over half a million solid, glittering pounds of it—it—it stops

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thinking. Oh, Miss Cicely, what a splendid stroke of yours!"

Thorold started to whisper.

"It doesn't seem true. Is it true? I can't—"

"Shss!" breathed Cicely very softly.

They looked sharply at her. She was standing there half out of the cellar, her head was tilted up, her face pale and shining in the light, and she was listening, listening.

"Shss!" she breathed.

They listened.

"Moving," she whispered, "somebody moving."

They listened. And somebody was moving.

They heard a shuffle, a stealthy shuffle. The echo of a coat brushing a wall, came down to them through the narrow cañons of the walls.

They listened. And then whispering, whispering.

"There is the light—the light."

Phillip switched off his torch. Thorold's torch was out. Phillip turned and thrust

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Cicely downward. He thrust and sprang to his feet. He darted past Thorold down the passage.

At that moment the Germans rushed.

CHAPTER XI

IN the confined space of the catacombs there was, at once, a desperate fight. The rush of the Germans filled the narrow tomb of the passages with the swirl of a gale. There was a silent and awful energy in the charge. Phillip leapt to meet the first man. It was the only hope. One might hold that cramped gate against many.

One might hold it, but weight might force it.

The young Lieutenant struck hard against a stout body, and he gripped. There were thick and guttural oaths, the big body writhed and jibbed; then, between the confined walls, their shoulders wedged against the wall, both big men jammed tight. It was rather painful to Phillip's left arm, but he felt pleased.

"I've got him," he thought; "I've got the lot of them." He was just about to shout

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“Order the other men back or I shoot you”—and the other men charged.

They came on with a shock that unjammed the panting barricade. Phillip’s arm felt flayed, but from the ripe language of the big man he guessed Germany had felt it most. Under the shock Phillip was forced back, forced staggering along the passage, with the big enemy body floundered on top of him. Phillip recovered, closed again. There was a twisting and tumbling. The shock of a charge came once more, and Phillip went down. The big man went down too, but he was on top.

“On—on!” called a big voice just over Phillip’s ear. And the Germans rushed forward. Phillip had just time to strike, half-arm, into a body that yielded and gave off howls, when a legion of feet stamped over him.

The feet passed with a horrid and grinding rush. A heel smashed on to his hand. A large body stamped its way forward (“Glad for once Germany is *über Alles*,” thought Phillip, as he felt the man above him writhe under those boots), stumbled, came down on

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its knees on Phillip's shoulder. The hail of heels ceased. The man above Phillip did not move; he was weighty, but limp. Phillip, rather bruised, was conscious of a swaddled struggle taking place along the passage.

He heard blows; he heard Thorold express himself in fine and unscientific language. A Teutonic voice shouted that he was really painfully hurt. The fight eased, as though men were locked in close struggle. Phillip thought that if he could get free he could bring off a coup in rear attacks. He squirmed under his burden. The spark of the fight burst up fiercely again.

A rush and a sway. Scrambling feet came struggling down the passage once more. ("Good old sedentary Thorold," commented Phillip.) The fight bunched and stamped. Phillip knew that he was going to get it in the head in a moment.

He wriggled desperately. He got half up; a thick leg banged him against the passage wall, knocking him flat, making him feel rather sick. He heard a man strike and growl; a foot whizzed by his face in the im-

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placable dark. He heard someone stagger, and he heard someone swear, and that was Thorold. And as he heard Thorold shout, so a German shouted. It was a shout of hate, of anger, but of success. Thorold answered that glad yell. There were wild blows struck. A Boche yelped, but another German let go his voice again.

"I have him—I have him, the *schweinhund!*" the shout said. A bundle of twisting, writhing, struggling, scuffling men bumped with a crash against the wall by Phillip's head. . . . It seemed as though the entire population of Thorpwold had jumped onto him at a given signal. Phillip's mind went as black as the catacombs.

Light, like a pain, hit him in the eyes. He opened them, blinked, and shut them against the bright bitterness of torture.

"No, he is not dead either, this one," said the man who was directing the torch. Another man moved over to him, and this other man kicked heavily, choosing his ribs well.

The voice of Thorold arose.

"Thank you, Herr Offizier; I have always

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been curious to know what 'Kultur' was exactly. This exhibition on the body of my defenceless friend is convincing."

Phillip grinned. "Good old Thorold," he thought.

He opened his eyes. The place was flooded with light, so that it was painful, but he was able to follow events. Thorold was trussed up in a sitting position against the wall, as he was himself, and a large man was about to indoctrinate "Kultur" on the chemist with his foot. Phillip's eyes glinted at the large man.

"No, no," he cried, as the large boot was raised; "Stobbat wouldn't like that at all."

The large man—who had this morning been a Staff-Major, and was now a simple citizen of England—turned, cursing, on Phillip.

"Stobbat," he growled. "Stobbat. There is no Brigadier-General Stobbat, as you said—I have looked." He struck Phillip across the face with his fist as he spoke.

"There wasn't this morning either," said Phillip, showing a smiling face in spite of the blow. "But you seem to have been impressed.

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All the same, I'm glad you know now; I hate to see a joke lost, even on German spies."

The big man thrust his hand down to his pocket. But he didn't pull out his pistol. Suddenly he began to laugh, and his laugh was ugly.

"Ah, a joke," he snarled. "A joke—very good. You like a little joke—we will have one of our own. Oh, a very good joke—you will see the delicate humour of it very soon, my pretty friend."

A man came from along the passage into the light—all torches, even Thorold's and Phillip's, had been switched on. The newcomer shook his head. The ex-Staff-Major swore in a guttural voice, saying, "Perhaps Joachim will be the lucky one."

He turned to the pinioned men. "Oh, a joke—that's good. A good joke presently; and also this has been a good joke all the time. You thought your clever brains were outwitting us neatly—and we are here; and you are helpless in our hands."

Phillip saw there were three men standing there. He had thought there had been more.

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There were several things to make him wonder what exactly had been happening. As the big German leered down at him he turned to Thorold.

"How long was I unconscious, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Less than a minute," answered Thorold.

"Weren't any put out?"

"No; one or two rather mauled; but, unfortunately, none put out."

"Silence, pigs!" shouted the big spy, who had been rather mauled—obviously. "You are to hear of this joke—and perhaps you will laugh."

"It seems a very German sort of joke," said Phillip; "long, solid! However, if you are to tell it, we had better get it over now."

"You do not exasperate me—not now," said the big spy, holding himself in with considerable effort. "Well, we will speak of this good joke—it is one which will please you."

"See—it is you who have been trying to checkmate us all this day, yet it is *you* who have given us our greatest aid. You have

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given us the clue to the secret of Brandt's house."

He paused dramatically.

"Do you mind my asking—but is this the moment marked for 'loud laughter'?"

"Fool, do you not see? It is *you*, in your clever stupidity, who have led us to that which we did not know, but wanted to know."

Again a pause.

The big man prodded Phillip with his foot.

"You do not see it, my fine-feathered friend. Take your time. It was we—the sons of the Fatherland—who did not know the secret hiding-place of Brandt's house. We might have lost these precious things"—he indicated the red box and its contents—"but you—you have led us to them. You see? You understand now the fine joke?"

"It's not really a very fine joke," said Phillip easily. "You see, we knew you didn't know. It was necessary, however, to run risks. We relied on your celebrated national dullness to carry us through."

"Dullness—a German dull!" The big man

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reddened. "You fool Englisher, it is because you do not understand the perfection of the system that is working for your fall that you fail. It is you who are dull. Nothing is left to chance with us; yourselves, you walk sublimely, thinking your little brains supreme, and you are caught in the trap."

Phillip yawned.

"Oh, I wouldn't call sheer luck a very good trap," he said exasperatingly. And the German was exasperated.

"Luck . . . you fool Englishman, when will you and your race stop adoring this false god luck? Luck!" The German was carried away by just anger. "Luck! . . . when our system has drawn such a cordon round this house that you are seen directly you come walking into this village; your mild chemical friend is noted talking to the constable on guard at this house—one of your own constables, whom *we* make a pawn in our game. Luck! When we are able to see the first gleams of your torches and know at once that you are not only in the house, *but in the pantry!* Luck . . . !"

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“I now know,” said Phillip to his soul, “how little you do know. A brave mind of your kind would have mentioned Cudd and the car, and other things—if you knew of them.”)

“Luck! We will teach you to value your luck!” shouted the German. “We will give you every chance of finding how far your luck will serve. We will . . .”

A fourth man walked out of the darkness into the light. Phillip wondered if Thorold had hammered that man or himself. From the look of him, one of them, anyhow, had reason to be proud.

The last-comer saluted.

“Nothing,” he said in German. “I have been to the end. A *cul-de-sac*, it is—there is, nothing.” He spoke low, but he forgot the carrying powers of narrow catacombs. “I do not think she was with them.”

The other man who had lately come out of the darkness agreed.

“The same with me. Nothing to be seen along the other passage. And there was not a hole to hide a mouse—let alone a woman.”

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Phillip began to see some light on certain matters.

The men drew together, whispering, though the big man watched the Englishmen closely from the corner of his eye.

One of the men said, "She could not have disappeared so completely."

"If she *was* here," said another in a whisper.

(Phillip saw not only light but certain things to do.)

"Where was the red box hidden?" said the third man, appearing conscious of his own acuteness. "Find that hiding-place, and perhaps—"

"We have found that hiding-place," said the last-comer testily. He indicated the niche that was meant to hold a lamp. "You do not suggest a grown woman would hide in there?"

The man of bright suggestions appeared less conscious of his acuteness.

They discussed. Phillip chuckled inwardly. He watched them until they seemed engrossed. Then he leaned across to Thorold. He spoke, whispering tensely in French—and

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he did not forget how whispers carried in this underground place—"If Cicely only has the sense to get out of Sorwich" (Sorwich was the big town twenty miles northwest of Thorp-wold) "at once, the game will be spoiled for these beggars, after all."

Thorold, the brick, rose to the idea.

"Oh, but of course she will," he whispered back in intense French. "That's agreed, isn't it? If we're not at the hotel by six, she is bound to go off to H.Q. as fast as Cudd and the car can take her."

"Hope so," whispered Phillip. "But you know what women are."

"Don't you worry," said Thorold; "don't worry. It'll be all right—I can trust that girl."

The big man stopped the discussion in German. Dramatically he held up his hand for silence. With a gesture he bade one of his men pick up the red box that contained the precious plans of the half-a-million treasure cache. He came in front of the young men. He smiled sardonically.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said in French.

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"I understand French perfectly. You seem determined to coöperate with us—always." He bowed stiffly. "It will gladden you to learn that I have a car at my disposal which will get to Sorwich considerably before six o'clock—considerably before one o'clock to-night, in fact."

"Damn!" said Phillip.

"You utter fool, Phillip," raged Thorold.

Phillip, with enormous drama, tried to burst all his bonds in the Samson way. He failed, and fell back, swearing.

"And now," said the big man, "and now for our final joke—the one with the last laugh in it, my clever Englishmen. We are now to leave you here, bound—bound in the bosom of Mother Earth."

"But you can't," protested Thorold. "It'd be sheer barbarity—we'll starve."

The big man considered this the height of humour. He laughed immoderately.

"If I could be certain of your starving, why, I would try that pleasant little plan. But I will show you again—we do not leave such things to chance. You might free yourselves

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in time. Some prying Englisher might discover these catacombs, and you would be released to annoy us—and, of course, not starve. No; we cannot give you so much time to your thoughts. An hour, perhaps, we can give you, but no more.”

He nodded down at them, laughing in ugly fashion.

“See, you will sit here facing each other, seeing each other—yes, we will leave you a torch, so that you can miss nothing of each other’s emotions—and in an hour the end will come. You can have the whole hour to wait, to consider things—to realise how death will feel. At the end of the hour—”

He stopped, looked down at them.

“You were just becoming interesting. Why break off?” said Phillip.

The big man shook his fist in the young Englishman’s face.

“You will lose your *sangfroid* very soon, my friend—you will lose your dandy ways. In an hour—consider it well—you will be blown to pulp. It is now seventeen minutes past eleven; at seventeen minutes past twelve that work

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which the Zeppelin bomb failed to do on the house of Brandt will be completed by bomb. A bomb, remember—high explosive, which will not merely blow up this crazy house, removing all traces of its secrets, but will drive a force through these narrow passages with the energy of a big gun." He turned to Phillip. "You are a soldier—you know the forces of explosion in a narrow space like this—you will be able to instruct your friend."

Neither Phillip nor Thorold spoke.

"Ah, you are seeing my joke," said the big man. "Turn it over on your tongue—it is good."

He motioned the three men on.

"Good-night," he said. "Good-bye. I hope your thoughts will keep you occupied."

"Good-night," said Phillip. "I hope you find Nurse Cicely at Sorwich."

The big man laughed anew.

"No, no," he said; "you do not throw me off like that—I am not so foolish. I know your nurse is at Sorwich, and I am sorry for her."

They went off, all of them, down the passage.

CHAPTER XII

AT 11:22 by Phillip's wrist-watch he wriggled across the passage, began pressing with the strength of both feet against the angle of the wall—at the bottom.

He said nothing. Tacitly, both he and Thorold had felt that it was best not to trust even a whisper to these echoing galleries.

When he had pushed once or twice strongly, the square of blackness suddenly appeared in the floor. The pushing had been enough to make the lever on the underside of the trap move; Cicely had taken this as a signal, and had opened the trap. It was a risk, but this was a time for risks.

She came up swiftly, taking in the scene, as she saw it in the torch light, quickly. She opened her mouth, but Phillip shook his head.

She was pale; her eyes were shining with something more than courage; but she showed

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no timidity in her actions. She went across to Phillip, put her ear to his lips. Phillip whispered that his knife was in his tunic pocket.

In ten seconds his ropes were cut and he was free.

Phillip with a gesture bade the girl cut Thorold free, and then remain with him by the open trap. He took the torch, switched it off, began to crawl along the passage.

It was a slow journey—he had to go by sense of direction and touch, for he dare not use the torch yet—but slow as it was, it seemed an eternity to him and to the two waiting in the dark. It was, actually, no more than ten minutes before he came to the stairs. He went very slowly here. He even risked switching on the torch, though he screened it with his handkerchief.

At the bottom of the steps he found the bomb. He examined it, did not touch it, but went upstairs into the house.

In another ten minutes he was back with the others. He was walking by the light of the torch quite freely.

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"Come on," he said; "they've gone."

"To Sorwich—what splendid luck!"
breathed Thorold.

"Some of them have gone there, perhaps; but they all are out of this house, anyhow. And we must be too, very quickly."

They hurried through the passages. Near the stairs Thorold cried—

"What about that bomb?"

"Unfortunately, I have drawn its teeth."

"I shouldn't have said 'unfortunately,'" said Thorold, with a shudder.

"No—but look at it from the point of the dramatic and the mystifying, my dear Watson. If that bomb had gone off bimb!—blown up old Brandt's house—what a remarkably good bushel it would have been to conceal our light. As those jolly fellows read in their little *Daily Pale* tomorrow that the explosion had occurred, each would smile at each and say, 'Well, those two deadly sleuths, Phillip and Jimmy, are out of our way, anyhow.'

"We, who wouldn't be out of the way, would then have a clear and unsuspecting field. Unfortunately, I say it again, the bomb

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couldn't do its dirtiest. Brandt's house happens to have English families each side of it—and I'm really beholden to the patriarch in No. 5."

"How did you deal with it?"

"Nippers first—it is an electrical affair, with the wires advertising themselves in various directions—then a bucket of water."

They all stopped in the chamber at the bottom of the stairs.

Thorold spoke dejectedly. "But in any case," he said, "we're in a very bad way. We've lost all the papers, maps, schedule directions—what on earth could we do? Five hundred thousand pounds! Heavens!—Think of that being in our grasp—and lost. And we're absolutely useless without that map and those papers."

"Hence my reference to the value of a thoroughly convincing explosion," said Phillip.

"Meaning?"

"If they were sure we were dead, they'd be lulled; they might even go slow about the cache business—and we could do our work treading like Agag, for they would suspect

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not. Now we have just got to be dramatic, urgent, and bold."

Thorold picked up optimism.

"Ah, you haven't lost hope. I thought—but no, we must *not* lose hope."

"I never do," said Phillip; "not until I've lost the game, and not always then."

"And we haven't lost the game," said Cicely firmly. "We must go on—we mustn't wait. To the car."

"To the car," cried Thorold. "That's it—come along."

They were out of the house swiftly. They didn't trouble about cover now, but moved with speed. The wall was a little difficult, for there was no tree; but Cicely, for whom they were most afraid, went over it with twinkling ankles, like a slim and virile boy.

The moon was higher now, and they could see well enough. They were out of No. 5's garden without disturbing the household. They pressed on across the path, and then on to the fields. They were going as rapidly as they could across the uneven land.

They passed the trees and the stack on their

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right. Headed for the clump of trees that stood over the barn. It was all very quiet in the blue, thin light of the young moon. They could hear nothing for some time. And then they heard a car.

They heard the soft purring of a car, and their hearts were quickened. They knew it was the noise of a car standing still, waiting.

"Blessed man, Cudd," breathed Phillip. "He has the engine running so as to go off at the crack of the starting-pistol."

"That's it," said Thorold.

They ran on again, panting and slipping.

Thorold stopped.

"No," he said; "that's not the Napier—not all the Napier, anyhow. Listen—*isn't that another car?*"

They stood and listened, and there was the sound of another car, and it was on the move.

They heard it swinging along behind them.

"From the village," said Cicely. "It is a big car going along the village street. A big car—*their car . . .*"

They heard it going—they heard it turn out of the main street. Phillip began to run again.

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They all ran. As he ran, Phillip snatched up from somewhere a sturdy and uncouth branch of a tree. Their one pistol had been taken from them—they might have need of weapons.

For the big car, which could only be the German car, was turning out of the High Street, turning up the side road in which Cudd and the Napier were waiting. The Germans must see the Napier.

The Germans did see the Napier. They heard the pace of the moving car slacken. They heard voices calling out. They heard the moving car stop, though its engines remained running free. They heard voices again, and, coming to them over the fields, these voices seemed threatening.

They were very close, and they could hear the voices plainly.

They heard one sharp voice, challenging, and it was the voice of Cudd.

They heard a harsh voice commanding.

“Sp-shatt” went a shot with a shattering ring. Someone from one of the cars had begun to shoot.

CHAPTER XIII

THE three of them, Thorold leading slightly, charged down into the road where the cars were standing, shouting and making excessive noises.

The field rose a little, and then dipped again to the road. As they came to the small crest they saw the barn under the trees a little beneath them, and, in the light of the muffled lamps and the small moon, they saw the dramatic happenings that were going on. Phillip cried at once—

“Snappy man, Cudd; observe his ripe and beautiful tactics.”

Beneath them on the road was a large car, close-hauled to the flint barn; they knew its perfect stream-line at once—it was their own Napier. A little way up the road, going away from it, was another car, squat and powerful. That car was also stopped. From this car two men were alighting with singular nimbleness.

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They were dismounting on the lee side, so to speak, since Cudd, with a pistol, was to windward. They jumped to the road, crept quickly and cautiously along behind the big car's body. Two other men were in this car—the chauffeur and another—taking cover in the driving seat. As they looked, they saw both had pistols, but were not yet daring enough to expose themselves in their employment.

Cudd, the tactician, was not near his car. The Navy man in him had, perhaps, not taught him much trench work, but it had made him adaptable. He had nipped into the bank a little above the waiting Napier. On that bank he had good cover; from it he had a fine field of fire. He could cover the approaches to the car, while he was fairly safe himself. Also, any determined fellow firing at him would not hit the six-cylinder.

It was obvious that the men in the German car had only seen the Napier as they dashed by it. They had halted at once—probably in the hope of putting it out of action, possibly in the hope that they would find Cicely in its neighbourhood. They had been too dramatic

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about their action. Cudd, who might have been amenable to gentle approach, was a veritable *point d'appui* when threatened. It had been Cudd who had opened the firing. The Germans adopted caution the moment they realised the temper of their enemy.

They were moving to the attack. And they were moving quickly.

The business had to be quick. Even in a sleepy place like Thorpwold the report of a pistol was a matter likely to move men to a certain lively curiosity. The Germans determined to rush Cudd, and get the job over at once.

They were going to do it with ability. No mass effort about this. One man was slipping round the bonnet of the car, the other was moving to come round the rear. They were out in the manœuvre of double flank assault. Cudd, not being Janus, could not face both ways at one time.

The men had begun their charge when Thorold, Cicely, and Phillip arrived. They were out in the open when Phillip yelled.

Phillip charged down the slope for the

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hedge, shouting robustly as he went. He shouted at the top of his voice, "Come on, lads; we've got these blinkin' spies now!" He shouted a lot. He made much confused noise. Thorold, catching the idea, shouted a lot. Cicely shouted too, trying to be grim and masculine.

The Germans were just beyond the cover of their car when this onslaught of sound and humanity struck their ears. They paused. They hesitated. It is likely they thought that the entire mobilisation of Thorpwoold's Volunteer Reserve was on top of them.

Phillip reached the hedge, made as much noise as possible bursting through it, and crashed towards the road. The two Germans turned and sprang towards their car. Phillip, with his club, was out at them.

"Start," yelled one of the Germans. "*Sich eilen.*"

With a grinding noise the chauffeur had his gears in. The speaker jumped for the car. The second spy was running for the car also, but Phillip, with his extemporised club, was cutting across his line. The man ran, and

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paused, and his pistol flashed up . . . and Cudd fired.

Commendable Cudd; the Navy had taught him that a shot in time saves lives, and he saved one. The second German struck a curious top-like attitude, spun, and fell on to the road. Even as he dropped, the German car was off at a bunched rush.

Thorold ran out on to the road; but Phillip had Thorold at once, and flung him into the hedge again. Thorold might have protested bitterly at such cowardice, only the German in the car started peppering the district with the full contents of his automatic. There was a lot of dust struck up by the whizzing bullets; there was a clipping of pellets in the branches overhead. No harm was done. As the German car swung round a bend, Phillip yelled across to Cudd—

“Lively, my lad, swing the Napier round—*after them*. Quick—we’ll have the whole populace and the clogging minions of law and order here in a couple of shakes.”

Himself, he ran out on to the road to the side of the wounded man.

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"All right," he called. "A cushy one only—through the leg. The fall stunned him. He'll wake up and tell a great lie to the local police in a minute . . . but I'll have his little gun, anyhow."

He picked up the man's pistol from the road, went swiftly through his pockets, making himself master of a packet of cartridges. Cudd was in the six-cylinder at once, and was swinging her round so as to take up the pursuit. They mounted even as the automobile was on the move, Thorold and Cicely bundling into the back, Phillip jumping up beside Cudd in front. They began to pick up speed.

As their stride developed, regular and special constables evolved into the scene. They seemed to bloom in all quarters—to thrust themselves from all angles. There was much shouting.

One sturdy fellow flung himself across their way.

"'Alt," he yelled, "in the name of the lor!"

"Go right ahead," said Phillip to Cudd. "His sort is the jumping kind."

"In the name o' the lor!"

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Cudd opened out.

"In the name of the King—jump!" shouted Phillip. "Get out of the way. We've got to catch those—spies, you chump! Don't hinder his Majesty's Army."

The man was of the jumping kind. They were by him. They were going fast. In a flash they were round the bend.

As they swung round the curve they saw in the distance the glint of a red rear-lamp. It winked through a swirl of dust a thousand yards in the straight before them, then it lifted, veered, and was gone.

"Round the next bend," said Cudd. "But we've got 'em, Sir. With this car on their 'eels they don't stand no earthly."

"Good lad, Cudd!" shouted Phillip. "You got off the mark in very neat fashion." He bent forward and began to unscrew the wind-screen.

"If they start shooting, or we do, we don't particularly want splinters—glass in the system is so deleterious."

He fancied he saw a smile on Cudd's face. He himself began to dispose clips of cart-

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ridges into handy pockets, and to make sure that the German pistol was fully charged. It was.

The Germans probably had a good car—from the speed of it, it was obviously not one of your maiden-aunt brand of makes—but, good as it was, the Napier was its master. It was not merely that the great-hearted six-cylinder could sweep across country at a speed capable of taking the pride out of crack expresses—the six-cylinder also was of the build that laughs at the follies of road-makers and the inevitable damnableness of cart-tracks.

The road was not merely bad going—it was quite infernal—yet in its deep and gorgeous rush the big car swept forward without a falter. Cudd, with a hand and mind of steel, kept her to it; and she answered, and strove with all the mettle of a blood horse out to win a race.

Thorold and Phillip and Cicely clung tight—or rather, they did their best to cling tight. Semi-elliptic springs and anti-rolling devices are good friends and true, but this was not their day for performing miracles. Nothing

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in the shock-absorbing line would have made that road amenable. The occupants of the car realised all the actions and emotions of a pea in a rattle.

The big car rushed on with its vibrant, its purring, and luxurious passion of speed. Apart from the bumping, the motion was intoxicating. There was a swinging and swift poise in the flight that seemed to invigorate their souls with the sparkle and zest of fine wine. The trees went by them in a blurr, the hedges melted into a running roar of grey upon grey. The road kicked away under them, and vanished, but always went on. It was gorgeous, glorious, irresistible, ineffable.

They swung round a bend, and Phillip looked ahead.

"Lord," cried he to Cudd, "have we lost her?"

Cudd was already slowing.

"Main road 'ere, Sir. Right and left turns —which way do you think . . .?"

Phillip was already out on the step.

As they slowed he was down into the road,

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looking eagerly at the surface as the light of his torch revealed it.

"What is it—what is it?" Thorold and Cicely called from the back of the Napier.

Phillip was already springing to the running-board.

"It's good luck," he called. "She's already dropping blood like a wounded beast. I thought that road would shake her up a bit. There's a most emphatic trail of her heart's oil . . . left, Cudd, she is running into the wilderness for sweet obscurity's sake. *En avant!*"

Cudd *en avant*-ed.

They were off on a fine road, running deep into the flats and the loneliness of this locality. The Germans were evidently hoping they would throw pursuit off the scent by striking away from habitable parts.

The great car was after them in its lyric stride. The sleek purr of the engines grew and expanded into the fine, free song of untrammelled speed, a chorus growing strong and sonorous in its unfaltering timbre of power. The land went from them, the trees

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went from them, the hedges were no more, only was the sky above them, and the fleeting vision of the road beneath—and all else speed, speed, speed: speed fluent and smooth, speed resistless as a bird's—speed skimming, silken, exquisite, like the rush of a star through the velvet planes of the night.

Speed! Speed!

Phillip sat back and smiled at the glory of it. Cicely sat still and drank it in. Thorold, feeling godlike and superb, scrambled forward, hung over the driving-seat by Phillip's head.

"They'll never escape," he cried. "How can they expect to escape from a car like this? They're done."

"They are," said Phillip. "Look ahead."

Thorold looked ahead.

Rocking from side to side, and dim in the dust-clouds, there was the red light ahead.

CHAPTER XIV

THE red light was ahead. Dimly ahead; perhaps eight hundred yards away. It rocked, blinked, dimmed, flickered, went out, and appeared again, as the dust of a fleeting passage swirled up. It hung steady for a moment without flicker ("Tar surface," thought Phillip). It vanished entirely. Nobody was very perturbed. There are angles in the best-laid roads.

They just rushed on.

They were round the bend. Marvellously—the red lamp was five hundred yards nearer. Cicely and Thorold shouted riotously. Phillip jerked forward, and his pistol arm went out.

Cudd ground on the brakes.

They halted three feet from the barrel.

It was an ordinary barrel—a tar barrel. One of those barrels that municipal councils strew so prodigally by the roadside in the

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periods when roads take to themselves a new top-dressing of dust eradicator. It was an ordinary barrel, but its position was extraordinary. It had been rolled right into the centre of the road.

They saw at once why the German car had come suddenly so near, Phillip summing up the position of the car realised more than the presence of the barrel.

"Get down," he called. "Get down."

He flung himself from the car. A pistol from the roadside began to go off.

The spies, as Phillip put it after, had jet-tisoned a well-armed Jonah, that their car might get away in safety. This fellow had rolled the barrel on to the road to stop the pursuing car, and when it had stopped, he busied himself in an attempt to damage the Napier's machinery. His first excited shot flew with a yell over the car, his second flicked the paint from the top of the bonnet.

Phillip's automatic spoke. "Bang—bang—bang," it went, calmly, evenly—one, two, three. There was a scuttle in the shadowy band of roadside grass. "Bang," went Phillip's pis-

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tol. And he was running boldly on to the pistol fire. "A man is always so upset if you just ask him to shoot you. He can't understand what's wrong, and shoots wild," he said later. But now he ran on, asking to be shot.

Thorold had sprung from the car, and was already working at the barrel. A pistol flashed and spat from the shadow, and Phillip fired again. There was a shout, and a loud plunging through a low hedge. Then splashing, as the unseen spy encountered a minor sort of dyke. Thorold had twisted the barrel clear, it was rolling towards the gutter.

A scrambling from the other side of the dyke. The thudding of urgent feet as the unseen one ran. There were no more shots.

"Guess the ditch that took him for a time took his gun for good," considered Phillip. He ran back as Cudd called.

Cudd was not of your hesitant, "Wait-until-I'm-told" school. He had the electric starter at work directly the road was free. Phillip only just grabbed and got in as the car gathered way. In spite of that, Phillip regarded Cudd with the greatest affection.

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They were on again, picking up the chase of miles.

And they were more confident. There were only two of the Germans in the flying car, now. They would not stop again for any tricks. They dare not risk it. They must simply depend on chance, and pace—and the Napier had the pace of them.

Thorold and Cicely both crowded towards the driving-seat, forced their voices, their questions and their theories into Phillip's ears against the pent-up gale of the rushing wind.

"Will they get clear before we can catch them?"

"Don't know . . . road," called Phillip. "Do you?" This to Thorold.

"I think it is the Marsh Road—unlimited miles from end to end, no real side roads, and few houses."

"We'll have them, then, I think," said Phillip.

Cicely said quickly—

"They might be luring us on, away from the others—the Staff-Major man, and the

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plans. The Staff-Major isn't with them, I'm certain."

"We're lured, anyhow," shouted Phillip. "If we don't catch that car, we've done nothing—or worse—to-night. But I cling with hope to that car—"

"Do you think the maps and schedules, the red box, in fact, are in that car?"

"There are dim reasons for optimism."

"What reasons?"

"The route of the car—no, not now, but at first. Before they discovered ours, they were pushing off away from regular tracks—away from Sorwich, for example. Yet some of them were anxious to meet Miss Cicely at Sorwich, *very*. We take it that the large Staff Major is one of the Sorwich reserve. That means he is setting out on a task, which might be a dangerous task. There are always police on the telephone at such a place as Sorwich. He wouldn't take such vital and important things as the essential plans of that half-a-million pound cache into the lion's den, do you think? No! He went off to do his worst, with Miss Cicely at Sorwich, the other Germans in

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the car hid themselves and the red box to a place of safety. That is what we must deduct. The discovery of our car was an unrehearsed incident for which these fellows must be cursing themselves robustly."

"That seems logical," agreed Thorold. "Also their attempt to stop us, and not to fight and capture us, fits in. I think you are right. The red box is in that car."

"Being right is a sort of habit with me," said Phillip in his bland manner. "I was inoculated with the serum very early. We will take it as proved that those plans are in that car. And—"

"Yes?"

"There is the car."

There was the red light of the car, veering and blinking before them. They had come round an easy bend, and now when they saw it, it was painfully close.

The superb car that had carried on with its dazzling speed had been mainly answerable for their success, but the German car itself had helped. As they looked at the enemy they saw at once that something was wrong. She

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was steering very badly, she was going exceedingly fast, but her effort was wobbly. There was also a sinister noise in the air.

"Somethin' knocking," said Cudd with enormous satisfaction (there was nothing in his own car that even tapped). "That road be'ind gave 'er a-doing, not 'arf, I bet. Shook 'er up until 'er bolts oozed out."

Well, yes, something was certainly knocking, though the enemy, despite it, held to their furious and exorbitant pace.

It was, however, not at all the pace to win.

The big Napier crept up. Yard by yard, foot by foot, it crept up. The red tail-light ceased to wink, burnt steadily. The sting of the enemy's dust blew in their faces, the reek of the enemy's exhaust came to their nostrils.

They crept up. They were overhauling their prey with leaping strides. They were winning, they were winning!

"Better get into cover, Miss Cicely," said Phillip. "It's all up with them, and they have contracted the habit of being frightful to the last."

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"Shooting?"

"Shooting—I'm going to do some running fire myself." He knelt, rested his pistol on the scuttle dashboard, sighted carefully, fired. A string of flashes burst high up in the other motor. There was a shrilling overhead, the head-lamp to the left of Phillip's elbow shattered and went out.

"One to him; none to me," commented Phillip.

Cudd leant over to the instrument board and switched off all lights.

"Yes, he had a target in our lights," said Phillip; "but I guess that was pure luck. Firing from a racing-car at a racing-car is not helpful to the Bisley manner."

The cars pulsed onward. Cudd was now forced to check speed. The German car was well on the crown of the road, and they could not pass her. Also, if anything happened to her, it might mean disaster to themselves at that pace.

Phillip fired once, and held fire. He was watching for the flashes. The marksman in front believed in large and spreading doses of

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rapid shooting. He emptied the whole of his magazine rearward once more.

Phillip fired—one—two—three, carefully and closely.

Thorold, who saw that the more fire that was opened the greater chances there would be of getting home a lucky shot, began loosing above Phillip's head.

"Don't shoot Cudd—very much," cried Phillip over his shoulder. "There are also parts of me quite vulnerable to bullets—otherwise the idea is extremely good."

They both hung, waiting, for ten seconds; loading afresh, then waiting . . . the little orange-flowers of flame began to dance over the flying car.

Thorold and Phillip opened at once—let their magazines run out.

The orange sparks died. Their own shooting died.

"No luck," cried Thorold. "No luck—"

"Fire-eater," began Phillip. Then he yelled, "Brakes—brakes, Cudd! For the sake of Haig . . . brakes, and left—left incline!"

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Cudd was braking. Cudd had already swung the car to the left.

The German car had swerved to the right.

The red light had waggled idiotically, then it had streaked off, madly, furiously, to the right. There was a grinding and a bumping; there was a long, tearing crash—screams were in that crash; there was a spitting and tearing of turf. A black, monster mass reared in the air as they ground and bumped by. The last smash was appalling.

The Napier pulled up ten yards ahead. Phillip was out and running to the wreck. Thorold was not a foot after him.

“Poor devils—poor wretches!” cried Phillip.

As they ran, a little shoot of flame wriggled out of the crumpled mass. It vanished. It came out with a stronger ardour. In their very faces a great sheet of fire sprang out of the wreckage, and the whole mass was burning.

They were all out of the car now, facing this angry pyre that roared and danced about the shattered car. The petrol was running in

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vicious, serpentine wriggings across the road, and the flames danced over these tortuous rivulets. The grass seemed on fire. The ditch into which the car had overturned was a bed of fire; there were lakes and lagoons of fire all about the place. The pile was burning terribly, irrevocably. The two men in the car were probably beneath.

Cudd came up.

"Extinguisher, Sir!" he shouted to Phillip.

Phillip knew it was hopeless, but he pointed into the deeps of the flame. "There, there's a man . . . he's dead, I think—but—but one never knows . . ."

The chemical of the extinguisher drove dark caverns and holes into the mountain of flames. It was a good extinguisher, but against a conflagration so utter and complete the best extinguishers were hopeless. The flames were beaten back in detail; the rills and runnels, the seas and lakes of flaming petrol, returned in mass. Cudd dropped the extinguisher; it was done.

They could only stand looking at the flames.

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Cicely caught Phillip's arm. She pointed to a raging lake of fire.

"Look—look—that is the box, the red box!"

Thorold and Phillip saw the red box.

It was lying on the road, where the force of the crash had thrown it, and about it in a wide arc were the defences of flame. It was half-open, some of its contents had been spilled. Those that were not already burned were already charred. The whole box was blazing fiercely.

And there was no mistaking the box. It was the box on which all their hopes were centred—it was the box containing the plan, the details, the directions of the £500,000 cache.

They all saw at once what had happened—how hopeless had become their case. Thorold saw it violently. He made a stride towards the flaming lake.

Phillip stopped him.

"No good—no good at all. It is already burned. To burn yourself will not help now."

They could see, in the flames, the one German Phillip had pointed out. He was a dead man. The other, they guessed, was under-

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neath. They thought it best to leave things as they were. Who can tell whether they were right or wrong in leaving the blazing car and its apparent victims alone?

As they started, with despair in their hearts, to return in the car—as the car was already moving—a dark figure appeared by the hedge. He was a wry figure, probably hurt. He was undoubtedly one of the two men of the wrecked car, who had escaped, miraculously, as some men do, from the grand smash-up. Probably the hedge had broken his fall.

He stood by the hedge and cursed them. He called, "You are beaten—you are beaten. I have seen and heard all. You are beaten." He fired a pistol at them.

Cudd put his hand down to the brake.

"Go on," said Phillip. "We can't do any good now. He knows nothing—and he might shoot us before we get at him, anyhow."

The Napier went out of range at top speed, carrying a freight of very depressed people.

CHAPTER XV

JIMMY THOROLD was in his big laboratory study when Phillip came in the evening. When the servant spoke to him across the telephone from the private house, Jimmy said that Phillip was to come over, and he asked: "Is Miss Baistain back yet? Well, when she returns, and if she would rather come here than remain with my mother, please bring her over."

Phillip came across the flagged and lichened garden that stood between the laboratory and the house ("As a protection against stinks," Thorold said), and found his way into the chemist's presence.

Thorold was industriously doing nothing in an armchair, with his feet on another. He suggested, with a nod of his head, where a chair comfortable enough for Phillip might be. And he remarked, without taking his pipe out of his mouth: "The work I ought

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to be doing just now, is rather important. It's for the Government."

Phillip disposed his perfect self in a satisfactory chair. "I've seen much other Government work done with the same strenuosity. There is something about a Government job that soothes. I have often wondered why someone enterprising doesn't track the germ, bottle it, and advertise it: 'For Insomnia and that Harried Feeling, try our Extract of Government Contracts.'"

Thorold laughed, and sat up.

"Oh, that's not quite true," he said. "Everybody on Government contracts is working—if anything—too hard just now."

"I know," said Phillip. "That's what makes it amusing. I quoted popular opinion: popular opinion has the same bright idea about staff work. When we have come off a solid twenty-two-hour spell 'over there,' we love to pick up a paper and read the jolly bits about our dances and gay times and general indolence."

"In this particular case, too," went on Thorold, "there are exceptional circumstances.

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That infernal paper, that infernal half-million-pound-cache, has come between me and gas-solvents."

"And you scientific squareheads are supposed to have the detached mind! I don't want to win easy money, but I will wager all I have to spare at Cox's that you haven't slept since we got back this morning."

"No-o. Well, not a wink. Why—have you?"

"Beautifully. After we had breakfast here I wended my way, as a pretty lady novelist might say, to the portals of my hotel. I sought my bed, slept like a clock, and woke like one. Lunched, a little late, but that didn't save the lunch. I took the sun, and did certain things privy to me, and now I am here ready for the very finest you can do in dinners."

"You're a wonderful chap, Phillip. Haven't you been worrying at all?"

"I forgot how to worry at an early age. Considerable acquaintance with 'crumps,' 'whizz-bangs,' and the like has confirmed my attitude. It's sheer waste of good emotional tissue to indulge in a gloomy, jolly, suicidal

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worry, if a large meaty shell is going to come along and cut you off before the worst has happened."

"And matters like this, what do you do with them?"

"I do them up neatly, put them away into a pigeon-hole, and remark: 'You will have my earnest and best-applied attention when I have slept and had luncheon, and eaten Jimmy's dinner.'"

"Then you haven't given up hope yet? To me, success now seems quite beyond reason. I've turned it all round in my head, but since we have lost that map and the directions, we have lost our chances—that's how I see it."

"But you haven't slept, and your lunch was probably milk and a bun."

"Bovril and toast. Still, does that alter things? I mean, can you see any way to success?"

"Oh, *I* haven't had dinner yet. I'm not scheduled to think of the half-million cache until after dinner."

Thorold laughed in spite of himself.

"Phillip slightly ineffable, but still Phillip.

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You shall have a good dinner the moment Miss Cicely arrives."

"Ah," said Phillip languidly. "Cicely, you haven't heard from her yet?"

"Phone—apart from private house—still out of order. But should I? She went to the hospital to sleep, like you; no time to lunch like you, too, and generally I don't see her. She will come back for the night—you remember my mother asked her to sleep in the car should have brought her by now."

"Good! Cudd will be with her. Jolly good, Jimmy."

"Why insist on Cudd? Is there—?"

"How would you warm it in winter without a fire? Oh, I see—those radiator heaters. It's really most cosy."

"But keep to the point—"

"It's more than cosy," said Miss Cicely from the door. "It has an air. It looks like a home." Miss Cicely looked at Thorold—"like you."

The young men stood up. It was obvious that Thorold liked things to look like a home when Miss Cicely thought they did. He stepped forward at once.

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“Well, it should be like Jimmy—he made it,” said Phillip.

Cicely turned to Thorold.

“I was sent, primarily, to bring you to dinner; but I want to hear how you ‘made it,’ and I want to see it all.”

“Phillip should have said I adapted it. It was actually an old stable. I re-fitted it, enlarged it, put that bay over there—for experiments and laboratory work—so that it could be cut off from the general study-effect of the room—built those recesses at the end, the retort-cupboard, the stock-cupboard, the ‘stink’-cupboard—”

“What is a stink-cupboard?” from Cicely.

“Well—well, just what its name implies. When, say, we have finished an experiment with some acid or compound, and the retort holding the fluid is still giving off vapour, we put it into the stink-cupboard, and let it vapour itself to extinction.”

They were walking about the big and lofty room as they spoke. It was a splendid room; habitable, book-lined, arm-chaired, and cosy, like a study; but with its recesses, its racks

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and tables of retorts and test-tubes, and the rest, a laboratory too. Thorold opened the door of the stink-cupboard. "You see, there is pretty ample vent to carry the noxious vapours away. We simply shut the door, and the thing is muzzled."

"I suppose this cupboard is very necessary at times?"

"Very. Some of the things we put in here are very efficient man-killers. While we handle them we use masks—there they are, hanging in a row in the laboratory recess—but masks are not quite helpful for delicate experiments."

"It'd be unfortunate if the gas baulked at the vent and back-fired through the cupboard door," said Phillip.

Thorold smiled.

"That can't happen—the door is a patent one. It isn't quite air-proof—nothing is, *quite*—but it is about as air and gas proof as anything can be. Once that door is shut, nothing (or next to nothing) can get through." Thorold turned, speaking eagerly to Cicely, delight at his own design and craftsmanship in his

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heart. "And these windows may interest you, Miss Cicely. You must look at them now, before inexorable lighting orders make us shutter them. They are rather high—that is to throw down an even, uninterrupted light, that's one point. They are of patent crystal, in case some untoward concussion broke them."

He picked up a book and threw it at one of the windows. The window did not even star.

"We don't want to try now, but I am willing to wager that you'd find it intensely difficult to make a hole in one of those panes of glass. And the reason of that is that for certain experiments the air must be practically still—we daren't get a draught through a cracked window. For the same reason, all these windows lock, and so does the door. This place can be, at will, hermetically sealed."

Thorold pulled a little lever in the wall. The door shut with a muffled bump. Somewhere in the big room a window shut, also.

"The room is hermetically sealed now." He smiled at Cicely and Phillip.

"And yet," said the girl, the nurse in her

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thrilled by the working and workmanlike facts, "and yet the air is quite good."

"We have to have air, naturally," smiled Thorold. "Even chemists can't do away with the problem of breathing. But here we try to obtain air that is as moveless as possible. There are ventilators in the roof. They pass the air through valves and screens, until there is practically no current. They make it possible to keep alive when the door and windows are locked. The ventilators can be locked too, if exigencies demand."

"I see the reason of radiators," commented Phillip. "No chimney draught with radiators."

"That is one reason. Another is that we can't possibly have an exposed fire in a room where all manner of experiments—some of them dealing with explosives—are conducted. Another reason of the regulators is that we can fix our temperatures. Electric light, too, you see. Electric furnaces for heating—we are thoroughly up-to-date . . . though I'm afraid the subject is not so up-to-date as dinner, for which Phillip is pining."

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They walked towards the door.

"A most bewitching room," said Cicely.

"It has all the attractions of a well-furnished tomb," said Phillip. "Jimmy has only to lock his windows and doors and ventilators, open his stink-cupboard, conjure up a vapour, and die in the glory of stink and comfort."

"Hunger has made you funereal," said Thorold.

Thorold explained, as they crossed the lichened and flagged garden to the house, how happily the old stable had fitted into the necessities of things.

"I don't always want to be as far away as the Works to do my experiments, and yet experiments don't make a home comfortable. The old stable was quite the happiest means. Completely apart from the house, yet only thirty yards from it. It fitted in splendidly."

Thorold's mother was a delightful person. She had a fine and gracious house, and she made her guests welcome in a fine and gracious manner. The primary fact weighing with the tall and dignified lady was that the

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guests had been invited to the hospitality of her house. She never abused her hospitality with the slightest sense of curiosity, veiled or outspoken, or the slightest sense of chilliness.

Thus, if she had any thoughts about Nurse Cicely, her advent, and her part in the vaguely told story of the night's doings, she did not serve up those thoughts at meals. She made the dinner homely and delightful. She talked of many things, and talked of them in captivating fashion. She was, apparently, one of the few living Englishwomen who did not use the Government—its crimes or its virtues—as the backbone of all social intercourse.

Mrs. Thorold, too, was of the school of women who can use their own minds. She did not examine pedigrees before she examined personalities. She relied upon her knowledge of human nature to judge those with whom she came in contact—those who came to her house. She had formed her own opinion of Cicely, and it was good. That, and her trust in her son, enabled her to take the nurse completely into the radius of her regard.

Only once did she seem to bring a jarring

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note into the bright congress of the table, and that was not her fault, but perhaps Phillip's. She asked Cicely—

“And did you have the rest you needed at the hospital—a good, undisturbed sleep?”

Cicely, about to answer, looked up to find Phillip's smiling but curiously keen eyes upon her. She paused a little.

“My sleep was quite good,” she said. “I feel another man after it.”

They all smiled.

“My *sleep* was quite good too,” said Phillip, with a curious emphasis; as he spoke both the girl and he exchanged a quick glance.

But nobody noticed the interchange. Thorold began to talk of the novels of Joseph Conrad, and the moment passed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE big laboratory-study was luxuriously cosy. Thorold's servant had fastened the big light-proof shutters across the windows. Curtains were drawn over the recesses; with the books and the shaded lights the large room radiated comfort.

Thorold from his chair said: "Well, now, Phillip, you've had your dinner, and have satisfied your carnal cravings, perhaps you will satisfy my mental anxieties. Now, your theories about this half-million cache."

Phillip sat deep in a Varsity chair. He was pulling serenely at a small, but perfect Murias cigar.

"I am theory-less," he drawled. "I was never one of your A1 at Lloyds men in theory. Theories always seemed to me very 'past military age.' You've only to scratch a retired colonel in a club, and you come upon a per-

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fectly seething sub-strata of theory. Theories—”

“Don’t be eloquent, be helpful,” pleaded Thorold. “You’ve told me—”

“Phillip,” cried Cicely, “stop being Phillip and come to facts.”

The glittering Staff-Lieutenant laughed at the pretty Nurse.

“Ah,” he said, “facts. That is another matter. If Jimmy had only mentioned the blessed word ‘facts,’ I would have understood. The facts of the case are the things to work on, but theories—”

“Then you think that facts are there? They will help?”

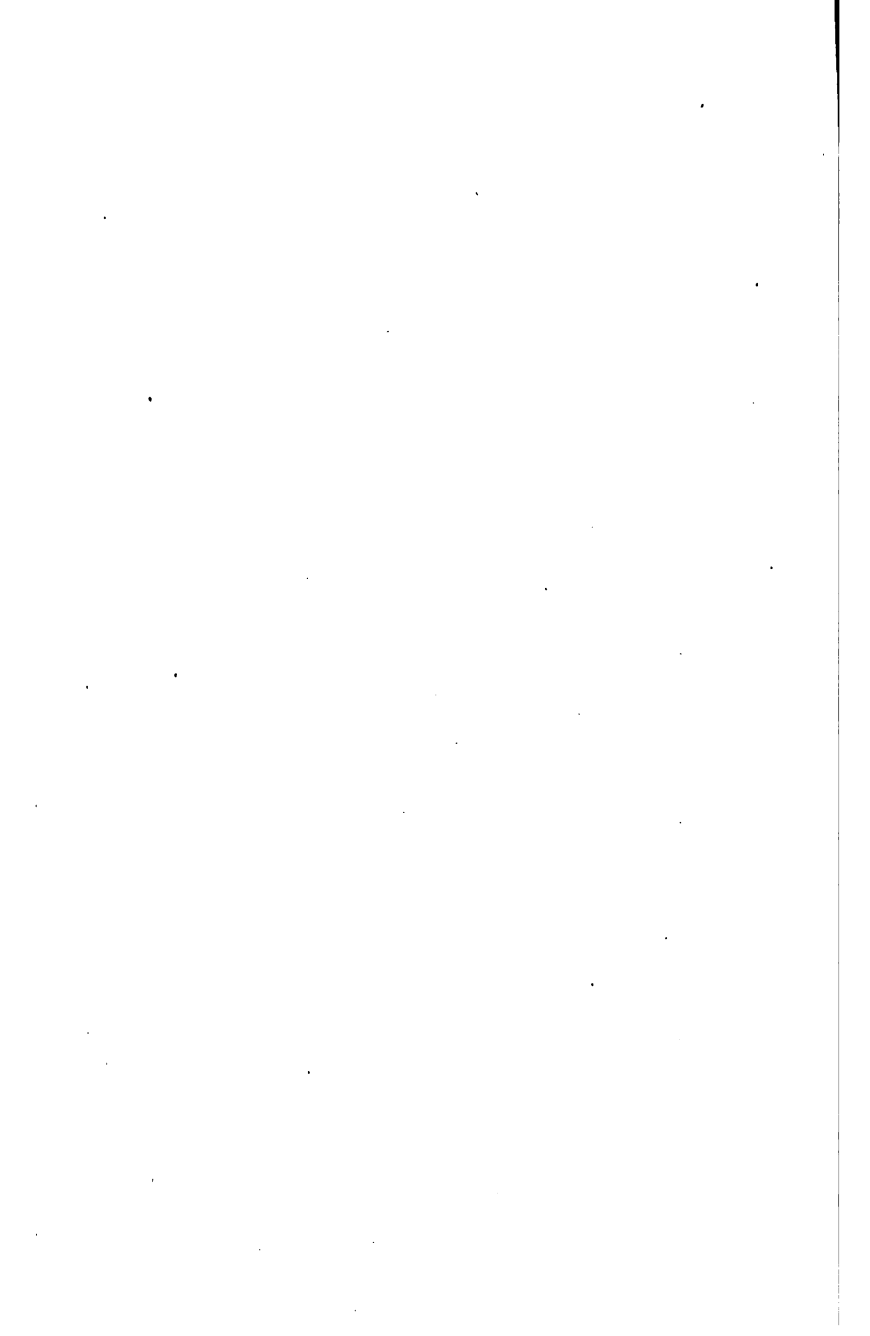
“Jimmy, you know as well as I do that facts are here. And when facts are about they have to be *made* to help.”

“No, I don’t see that at all. The facts are here, but they are too gloomy. We have lost those plans and the directions; in fact, they have been utterly destroyed in that fire. Well, what can we do now? Aren’t we utterly lost too?”

“The Germans also have lost those plans.”



“Praise God for three clear days—the Marne took not much more.”



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"Of course—of course; but you yourself told us that they could write across to Rotterdam, using the code word we have not got, and get a fresh supply of plans—but what can *we* do? *They* know we can do nothing."

"Well," said Phillip slowly. "Do you think they've got those plans already?"

"No—that couldn't have happened yet. They have only had two days, three at the most. Rotterdam could not have sent the new plans yet, so I think. To send them won't be easy, either, I take it."

"Not very. Let us say the Germans won't have those papers for two more days, perhaps not for three. Item One in our facts. We have two or three days clear to act."

"But if we have nothing to act on—? Be sensible, my dear fellow."

"Praise God for three clear days—the Marne took not much more, and look what happened then. We must handle our days as an asset."

"Very well. What next? Is that all you can offer?"

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Phillip looked deliberately at Cicely.

"We will take Item Number Two. There are certain things about this business, even though the papers have been lost, which seem unusual. What do you think, Miss Cicely? Have you anything to offer?"

"I think rather with—Jimmy," said Cicely.

She and the chemist exchanged a glance—a glance with something of blushes in it.

"Do you?" said Phillip. "Are you certain? When you said at dinner you had slept well, were you reserving something, or did I imagine it?"

"Oh," said Cicely. She thought. "Yes, I reserved something."

Phillip blew out a deep cloud of smoke.

"I knew imagination wasn't my long cue. Will you tell—but, no. Will you allow me to do a Curtis Clopp, the Great Intensive Investigator bit, Miss Cicely? I will tell you why you hesitated. Actually you slept well; the ill was after sleeping. You came back from, say, lunch—anyhow, after an interval. You entered your room. On the threshold

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you stood and gasped. Someone had entered your room. *It had been completely ransacked.*"

Cicely sat up in amazement.

"However did you know that?"

Phillip waved an easy hand.

"A mere nothing! A mere bagatelle!"

"But my dear old thing," cried Thorold. "If you're right, how *did* you know?"

"Oh, quite simple," said Phillip. "You see, I had lunch, I went for a walk—"

"You *saw* the brutes—" cried Cicely.

"Not at all. *I came back and found my room had been completely ransacked.*"

Thorold stook up rather excitedly.

"Phillip, this is astounding; but what does it mean?"

"We will go into committee and find out," said Phillip urbanely. "Are you going to walk about, Jimmy? You must? Oh, I don't mind, I'm used to Brigadiers on the stride—but you'll get warm. It has turned close, don't you think?—Now, we're in committee. Miss Cicely, please."

"Well, there's no more than you said. They

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ransacked my room, neatly, but quite completely. That is all."

"In general, yes; but would you mind amplifying details? For instance, the things that seemed to have most of their attention—were they letter-boxes, wallets, and all those sort of things, where you might keep things hidden?"

Nurse Cicely looked at the young officer intently.

"That's quite right," she said. "And you?"

"Oh, quite the same. All the secret recesses of my kit and my correspondence box were explored."

Cicely nodded. She seemed to understand.

"Nothing else to report? No other—interference?"

"No," agreed Cicely. "Nothing else at all."

Phillip sank behind his cigar smoke.

"Jimmy," he said presently, "what do you deduce from it all?"

"Nothing to any practical purpose. They know we've lost the plans, of course. That fellow saw all that happened by the burning car. They might think we had taken copies, but hardly that; what time had we to take

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copies of cipher? They might be wanting to prevent us putting our story before the local H.Q., but—”

“But they didn’t try to kill us,” interjected Phillip. “The best way to stop us causing further trouble (especially trouble with an H.Q. in it) would be to kill us. They haven’t killed us, or even attempted slaughter, so that knocks that line of reasoning on the head. What other?”

Thorold seemed to be a little hot, he mopped his head. He said—

“No, Phillip, this criminal reasoning is beyond me. I can’t see any object in it all.”

“Let us go back to the slaughtering point. Killing would put us out of the plot at once. Why didn’t they kill us? It wasn’t because of affection, or fear of the consequences, obviously. There must have been some essentially practical reason for letting a lad like me live. I argue that to kill me before they were certain of you two might have been a mistake in tactics. To kill me would be to startle other victims. You might take steps that would spoil their game.”

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"To protect ourselves?"

"To protect something they wanted badly; to hide it, destroy it, or hand it over to the Military Authorities."

Thorold in a nervous walk, stopped in front of Phillip.

"Protect something? My dear soul, you can't possibly be referring to that paper, the only thing we have concerning this business?"

"If you find out something else I have been referring to, you are a clever man, Jimmy," said Phillip. "And why shouldn't I refer to Brandt's paper?"

"Because—because it's quite worthless—you know that. We've examined every line with the greatest care several times. We have decided that it contains nothing save the directions that led us to the catacombs and the plans—and since we have lost them, we have lost the rubber. Why, you have decided that yourself more than once."

"A wise man can always change his mind in the face of powerful persuasion. I think those Germans have been persuading power-

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fully. I hope you have the paper on you, Jimmy?"

It had been agreed that Thorold, as the possessor of a fixed abode and safes and lock-up places, should keep the paper for the present. Jimmy put his hand in his breast-pocket.

"Yes, of course, I have. I haven't locked it away, yet." He produced the paper. Phillip took it. Jimmy said thoughtfully: "Possibly you are right, Phillip. It does seem as if they want the paper. Yes; they are working to an end. They have narrowed down the locality, as far as you two are concerned, to your bodies. They have made certain that the paper is not in your rooms, and that if either of you have it you carry it about with you. They have done it quietly, without disturbing either of you, or me. Now they know that the paper must be on either one of you, or on me, or in my rooms. They have drawn what you call a barrage ring around this laboratory. They know certainly that if a paper was kept in any one of our rooms, it must be in my room. That—"

"Are you certain?" asked Phillip.

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"Of what? Of my theory—?"

"Of your room?" said Phillip. Thorold stopped in front of the young man.

"My dear chap, I've been in it all day."

"Not at dinner-time," said Cicely evenly.

Thorold looked wildly about his room.

"Oh—no—no. They couldn't have come in here. How could they? I don't see any signs—"

Phillip said dryly—

"What did you do with your pistol, Jimmy?"

Thorold dashed to a drawer in his desk.

"It's gone," he cried.

"They took mine, too," said Phillip. "They were determined we should go unarmed at a critical moment."

Thorold, without a word, ran to the door of the laboratory. He jerked at the handle.

"My God, Phillip!" he called.

Phillip sat in his chair.

"From the general fugginess of the air," he said, "your patent ventilators are locked too. Also your windows."

Thorold sprang across the room to his

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patent levers. They moved with a particular nervelessness in his hands.

"Not merely locked," he cried, "the levers are broken."

Thorold stood quietly; cool, now, and unexcited, the scientist in him working with assurance.

"I've built a very good trap for the benefit of those brutes. They've got us neatly, in an air-tight tin, as it were. They'll attack us, of course, but how?"

"Something quiet," said Phillip, getting up. "They'll have no need to waste energy, or risk disturbance or ask for trouble by using noisy methods. How about the air?"

"It will last us for hours. This is a big place. Breathing will become extremely unpleasant, but it will last until daylight, and then—"

"Then it won't be the air. It will be something else—a bomb? No, not a bomb; not if they want that paper badly. They'll need to use something that is fatal, but not destructive. They must get something lethal into the room."

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Thorold laughed a little. He had gone over to Cicely, was standing very close to her.

"Dear old Phillip," he said. "Don't you realise that if this place is hermetically sealed for us, it is hermetically sealed for them."

"Quite positive?" asked Phillip. He was walking across the room. At the desk he picked up the telephone wire. It had been snipped off somewhere near the wall. He paused for a moment, indecisively, then walked over to the stink-cupboard. He called out—

"Thorold, old sport, come over here—not Cicely. Cicely will have my undying gratitude if she stays as far away as possible."

Nurse Cicely stayed; Thorold came.

"Look at your hermetically sealed abode of smells," said Phillip.

Thorold looked down and exclaimed. At the foot of the cupboard door was a row of holes bored into the wood.

"And there's a vent inside connecting us with the outer world."

"And those holes are at the bottom," said Thorold. He looked at Phillip. "Gas," he

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breathed. "German gas, heavier-than-air-gas, poison-gas."

Phillip was listening. There was, from inside the cupboard, a curious hissing noise, a noise with certain dull, eructating reports in it. Phillip looked at Thorold.

"I heard that first on April 23, 1915, when the Germans forced the French back northwest of Ypres, and uncovered the Canadian flank. That was the sound that first brought hate for Germany into the hearts of our boys. It was more distant then."

"It is the same now," said Thorold, "though it is nearer. They're discharging a gas-cylinder down that vent."

Even as he spoke the young man got the first beastly whiff of poison-gas. Thorold caught hold of Phillip and ran him to the end of the room near Cicely.

"Stay there," he called. "I'll deal with this. Luckily there are masks."

He ran forward, twitched aside the curtains screening the laboratory recess. And there were no masks. The Germans had not made so obvious a mistake as to leave them.

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Cicely shuddered slightly. Phillip brought a long library ladder forward.

“Get to the top of that Cicely,” he said. “It might not rise very high—sometimes it doesn’t.”

Cicely climbed, and both turned to watch Thorold and the room. There was already a yellow-green haze about the stink-cupboard. They knew it was death. They remained watching Thorold. It was his moment for action now—his alone.

He did not hesitate. Like many Englishmen, he was slow in theory, but unerring and swift in action.

He went across the room with rapid steps. He went into the recess he had named as his store. He was there no more than seconds. When he came out he had a big syringe and a glass jar of some sort of fluid in his hand.

He put the jar down, waved his hand back to them, and laughed. Truly this was his moment. As he laughed, he plunged the syringe into the jar, withdrew it, directed the jet towards the yellow-green haze.

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As he squirted, the haze melted and dimmed. He continued steadily to squirt.

In twenty minutes he was with them, laughing, triumphant. There was a thick reek of chemicals in the air, but there was no poison.

"After all," he cried, "I haven't wasted my time on government work. My job was gas-solvents. I have just tested my gas-solvent, and the test has been thoroughly successful. There is no more danger."

They paused. Each was thinking the same thing. Thorold said ruefully, "I should have said there was no more danger from gas. Those men will, naturally, break into this room presently—with masks on, no doubt—and we are entirely unarmed."

Phillip went over and stood under one of the windows.

"Which of these windows most infringes the lighting laws you declare inexorable, Jimmy?" he asked. "This one seems on the street side."

"Why, it is," cried Thorold. "And you can take down the shutters from the inside."

"I see," said Phillip dryly. "I'm going to.

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Will you take all the shades off the electric lights? Cut 'em off—get 'em off anyhow. I want light—dazzling oceans of light. Good, good!" He was working as he spoke. "I hope your special constables are of a most eager and militant breed."

"They are. I've thought them fiends up to this. But now—"

"There are moments when one can love even the most rabid of 'Little Lighters.' This is such a moment."

They stood looking up at the bare window shining in the bitter glare of ten large exposed electric lights.

"There is a more than quarter-moon on, so we are not being entirely dastardly," said Phillip.

"What's that?" cried Cicely.

There was a drumming uproar "without," as the plays have it.

"It is unmistakable," said Phillip. "No German spy would have the courage or the artistry to make so damnable a noise. It is the clarion call of duty sounded by a thoroughly enraged Special."

THE WAR CACHE

There was a hammering and a rattling of the laboratory door.

"Hans outwitted," said Phillip; "or, Done in the Eye by a Special. Cicely, we're through."

CHAPTER XVII

PHILLIP went to town the day following the German gas-failure.

He came into Thorold's breakfast-room, looking as though war were not, and only clothes were King. He had had Brandt's paper with him overnight, he handed it to Thorold.

"You keep this, now, Jimmy," he said. "I'm going to my rooms for ten minutes."

Thorold and Cicely looked up at him. They felt, very certainly, that this was a morning after a very terrible experience—while Phillip looked as though a dance had happened yesterday evening, and a garden party was all that mattered to-day.

All the same, Phillip was infectious. They smiled at him.

"Haven't you just come from your rooms?" asked Thorold mildly.

"Not those. I mean my London billet."

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Thus he dismissed a journey of a couple of hundred miles there and back.

"Has anything particular happened?" asked Cicely.

"Nothing at all. And you—a good night? That's jolly. Bit of a bore, but I must look into my digs—and come out again. I shall be with you by five o'clock. And—"

"Yes, Phillip?"

"I think it will be wisest for me to take that Napier, Jimmy."

"My car—Phillip, you're too good."

"I don't like to leave that jolly car about with these Boches in the air. Also, train journeys might beget accidents that would cut you off from the advice of me. Also, I *like* your car."

Thorold looked closely at Phillip.

"What's behind this move, Phillip? Last night you said that perhaps there might be something in Brandt's paper to give us a clue. You have had the paper all night. Now you offer no suggestion, but you go to London—for ten minutes. Have you found anything in Brandt's paper, Phillip?"

THE WAR CACHE

"I am going to London, for ten minutes, to find out," said Phillip.

"You'll tell us nothing more?"

"I've nothing more to tell. It may even be that I have something less to tell at five o'clock. Why not, for the sake of our rosy optimism, leave the matter over until five—tea will brace us against the rebuffs of the world, anyhow."

Phillip went to London. The car and Cudd went with Phillip.

Thorold and Cicely decided that it would be the better plan to stay within doors while Phillip was away. The big laboratory was pleasant, there was no reason for walking, and, indeed, there might be danger in it—and they would be together, alone and uninterrupted in the laboratory. The latter, though they did not realise it, was more important to them even than the avoidance of German spies bent on slaughter.

They sat and chatted, or moved about, and Thorold told the girl of the things in the room, the meaning of certain appliances, of the scope and romantic grandeur of the chemist's work.

THE WAR CACHE

Thorold did not think it particularly romantic or grand, but then the worker never does. All the same, the craft that can bring out of a little fluid, out of a watch-glass of crystals, out of a test-tube of coloured liquid, the germs of things that might mean sudden death to hundreds, or longer life to multitudes, or the opening up of great industries, or the means of battling with food parasites or germs, or the secret, chemical enemies of man—such a craft has in it a passion and romance more passionate and grand than most crafts.

Cicely thought so. As Thorold, growing quick and enthusiastic, explained; as his fine, nervous hands showed her the means and mysteries of his calling, his figure seemed to grow finer and more splendid, and more noble. He had an almost heroic mould in her eyes.

And being quite human also, she liked—as she had liked during all those weeks when they had met and passed as strangers—the clean, sharp line of his face, the warm intelligence of his eyes. And the way his close, crisp hair curled about his temples filled her with delight.

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To Thorold the nearness of the girl was more than a delight. Yet again, as always, he was filled with wonder at her swift slimness, her poise; the soft, fine roundness of her capable body. He was filled with wonder at the fire and delicacy of her face, the cool, golden purity of her colouring; the intelligence, the wit and vivacity of her mind. If it had seemed to her that this big laboratory was *his*, peculiarly fitted to him, he thought that he could not conceive a being and a spirit seemingly so right in its presence in this room. She moved amid its big, efficient spaciousness like a goddess in her habitual temple.

It fitted her, all of it fitted her. In fact, it fitted both.

"All this might have been made for you, Cicely," he said quietly. "As a background it might have been built for you."

"But—that is what I said of you."

Thorold smiled at her. He looked about his wide room.

"Perhaps, then, we have an affinity?"

He was looking at her very closely.

Her little chin went up, the curve of her

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throat was adorable, she glanced into his eyes, and there was a superb confusion, a delicious boldness in the bright depths of her own.

"Is there a 'perhaps,'" she asked softly.

"You like this room to be your room, peculiarly *yours*?"

"It is your room—yes."

"*Our* room—is that it?"

She looked at him again, smiling a little; blushing a little. She put her hand on his sleeve.

"Our room—always," she whispered. He took her hand, kissed her fingers.

"It is—it always has been. Affinities, in rooms or souls—you can't keep them apart."

"Why should you," she said laughing. "I love it—"

"And me?"

Pretty throat—how warm and sweet it was when she tilted her head to laugh.

"You can't possibly separate affinities," she laughed. "You and this room are one—I love it."

Thorold laughed too.

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“Well, I can’t wed the room, or kiss it, but—”

He kissed what he could of the triple affinity. And she held him strongly, and took and gave her kisses, too.

Phillip came to tea with an engaged couple at five o’clock. But he did not seem to see any particular change in Cicely or Jimmy. Perhaps there was no particular change. Phillip always had eyes to see.

CHAPTER XVIII

PHILLIP also had his own peculiar satisfaction when he came back from London to be to tea at five o'clock. And one's own peculiar satisfactions blind one's eyes to the immensities happening on other portions of the old, oblate spheroid. Phillip noticed that Cicely and Jimmy had a sort of magnetic attraction to each other. It was, perhaps, not really necessary to notice more.

Thorold, all amiableness and no particular pessimism, now asked cheerfully—

“Well, my glittering but minor Brass Hat, have you solved the riddle? Are you ready to lead us to the spot where the German half-million of gold and silver is hidden?”

Phillip put up a hand well manicured, but horrified.

“No, NO, NO, my dear old, bewitched Jimmy; that's not the way at all. That simply botches things. That simply destroys the neat

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thread of my something or other, which, with enormous labour, I have worked out. That is, utterly, the wrong attitude. Your pose is to be the pose of the slightly oaken-headed Watson. You begin: 'My dear Sherlock Holmes. I confess that, having turned over every fact of this inscrutable matter in the privacy of my stink-cupboard, I must admit myself baffled. I am utterly and inexplicably baffled. This is the worst baffle since last month's mystery. I am beaten; I must come to you.' Having said that you sink into a chair, despairing, and I proceed to tell your fortune, or the number of murderers, by cigar ashes and the mud on your boots."

Thorold chuckled.

"I think that is the Phillipic manner of saying he wants to begin at the beginning."

Phillip rose and shook Cicely's hand.

"With all my heart, I thank you, Cicely. See what you have done for my poor friend. He *sees* things. Mental ginger has been born in him."

Thorold sat deeper in his chair and laughed.

THE WAR CACHE

"Well, really, Phillip, in spite of all, we are enormously anxious. We must beat those brutes. Say, in spite of everything, you do begin at the beginning."

"I will," agreed Phillip. "The beginning is the fact that we thought that by losing the plans we had lost all chances to the hidden half-million, and the Germans began to persuade us that, perhaps, we hadn't. They began to trouble us again instead of leaving us to our dejection. As I said, if they wanted to stop our causing trouble at H.Q., or anywhere—if that was their idea, they might have killed us. They showed a curious reticence. On the other hand, they did show us that there was something about us, something we possessed, they wanted badly. As you happen to know all about this part, I will spare you details."

Phillip put his hand across. Thorold understood. He handed over the cipher paper of the German spy.

"The only thing about us that the Germans could value was, obviously, this paper. Their eagerness was curious. We knew, and they knew, too, that we had lost the vital plans, and,

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therefore, ought to consider ourselves helpless. They knew, and we knew, that they would get duplicate plans of the cache from Rotterdam, and we couldn't. Yet they persisted, almost viciously, in their attempts to get this paper—intact. We insist on the intact. If, to mention another point, they were afraid we might use this paper to block the entrance of the duplicate plans into this country, they might easily have stopped us by employing something entirely destructive—like a bomb.”

Phillip held up a finger.

“Point One in thread of circumstantial evidence. They wanted this paper, whole!”

A second finger went up.

“Point Two. Why? Well, cutting out any side-issues, we must agree that they wanted the paper because there was something valuable written on it. They probably do not know what it is, exactly; but they know enough to know that it would help them once they saw the paper. We will add as a footnote, that for them to possess the paper intact would be to have certain information which

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would be valuable to them if the duplicate plans *did not come through.*"

He paused. He looked at them.

"Are you carried away with my logic?" he asked.

"It all sounds highly feasible," said Thorold dryly.

"The heart of a fish—we will go on." Another finger went up. "Point Three is obvious, then. It is that the paper contains some reference, some direction, in fact, relating to the secret cache in which £500,000 of money and plate, to say nothing of other things, are hidden."

He opened out all his hand.

"Points Four and Five (I *will* use all my fingers and thumb) are, that we have missed this reference and what this reference is—I am perfectly clear to every one in my audience—?"

Cicely spoke.

"Not one of us fails to follow—or to enjoy the graceful manner of the expositor."

"You were always kind to me, Cicely," said Phillip. He lifted the paper. "Now to find

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the secret in the paper. Here is the paper.
I will read it out to you—

“WAR CACHE, ENGLAND
PP./39/.998352
DIRECTIONS
TO FIND
FULL PLANS AND DATA”

and so on, and so on. I'm not going to read any more, you know what follows. Also, as I have found, the secret lies in this heading. Now, does either of you find anything hidden in that?”

They came and stood by his shoulder, looking down at the paper.

“Jimmy?”

“Nothing at all.”

“Cicely?”

“There must be something, of course, but—?”

“That is a wretched, low, despicable, mean, horrible, loathsome, feminine device. You are hedging, Cicely,” said Phillip.

Cicely tossed her head.

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"I won't hedge," she cried. "There is only one line with some vagueness in it. That—"
She put her finger on the line—

"PP./39/.998352."

"And that, I think, is the voice of sheer ignorance," said Phillip.

"Perhaps. It certainly means nothing to me. Does it mean anything?"

"Jimmy?" asked Phillip. "What do you make of PP./39/.998352?"

"I take that for a sort of code number," said Thorold. "Possibly the index of this paper, or to the matter written on it, a reference to a folio, or file, I should say."

"Jimmy, you see," said Phillip to Cicely, "understands the official habit of mind."

Phillip grinned again.

"Both of you hedging," he said.

"This is thoroughly exciting, Phillip," said Thorold. "Go on."

"Like Cicely," continued Phillip, "that line 'PP./39/.998352' struck me as the enigmatical point. Being, like you, Jimmy, acquainted with the official mind and method, it seemed to me to be no more than a code number relating

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to a file or something else garnished with red tape. '998352'—*that's* quite Governmental. Don't it look rigid and red-tapey? You may not know the way of the Civil Service, Cicely, but the way of the Civil Service is to confuse the enemies of the King. One of the infallible ways of confusing enemies, the Civil Service feels, is to fog them with index numbers. No C.S. would be guilty of marking a paper or a printed form with the simple numeral '1.' That would be giving the game away to our foes. But mark a paper '001,' and Germany is confounded for all time. In '998352' I thought I had caught the Potsdam Civil Servant confounding us for all time."

"I hate to spoil a process of deduction," said Thorold; "but, of course, you proved it to be nothing of the sort."

"Verily. The point nine-nine and the rest looked all right—I guessed it must be an index number—but the 'PP./39' struck me as spoiling the *tout ensemble*—eh? 'PP./39' was a puzzle. I spent a lot of last night turning that upside down and other ways. It didn't seem to fit anything I knew. It had no father or mother

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or hand to guide me, so to speak. It was a great anxiety to me. Until I remembered . . .”

He put his hand into his pocket.

“What?” asked Thorold.

“A map,” said Phillip. He pulled out a clay-stained, crumpled, and dirty linen-backed thing—a map.

“First, I remembered maps in the whole-sale; then I remembered one in detail. Now maps, especially Staff maps, have their peculiarities. They are marked, scribbled on, and generally misused. Some Staff maps in particular are ruled with many lines—from top to bottom, and from side to side. These lines are generally numbered or lettered in the margins. The lines, as they cross the map, naturally make a number of little squares. These squares are usually numbered, in the squares themselves. All this—the line drawing and the squaring—is done for gunnery work, survey work, and the various things needing military accuracy. Puzzling over ‘PP./39,’ I thought of the lines and squares. And I thought particularly of a certain map I had.”

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He spread out on Thorold's desk the map he held.

It was a map marked by lines into a number of small squares—it was, in fact, a map of a certain section of the eastern coastline of England divided into little squares. They looked at it, startled. It was a German map.

“Jimmy, would you please read the code or index number of this map?” said Phillip. “There it is, up in that corner.”

Jimmy read: “Point nine-nine-eight-three-five-two—.998352—my Lord! *The* index number.”

“Quite. Now look at the lettering of the lines. A double alphabet, you note. A, b, c, d, and the rest across the top; a, b, c, d, etc., down the side. Follow the lines pp . . . and—they lead to Square 39.”

“Darlincove,” burst out Thorold. “Seventy-five miles from here. Great Huxley, that means the £500,000 is hidden at Darlincove!”

“Not quite. It means that it is hidden somewhere in the five-mile square which contains Darlincove. Somewhere within the five square miles of ‘PP./39’ is our treasure. That’s the

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jolly little secret of Brandt's paper—that is why those spies wanted to get hold of it. They are afraid we might guess—and, I suppose, on the whole we *shouldn't* have boggled like this."

"If we hadn't your map, it wouldn't have mattered whether we boggled or not. How did you get it?"

"A German Staff Officer was killed in Flanders in the November of 1914. This was among his papers. The W.O., of course, has a number of such maps. I really kept this as a curio."

"It is very carefully done," said Thorold. "Look at this—they've got the filled-in-well a mile outside this town. Our own maps don't give it; and ninety-nine of even local inhabitants don't know of it."

"Yes; it's beautifully done. We'd know to our cost how well the Germans have done these things if they ever landed. The man who owned this map evidently hoped to land."

"Well, we know where the cache is," said Thorold, with pleasure in his voice.

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"We know within five miles of where it isn't," said Phillip.

"No; we can't really be gloomy. We have a fixed space—that's the great point. We start with some advantage. Remember the spies probably don't know that—yet."

"And there might be other indications," said Cicely. "We might hit on a clue—or the paper, is there anything more in that?"

Phillip handed over the paper.

"Extract what virtue you can from it, Cicely," he said.

"Meaning you think we won't find anything more in it?"

"Meaning that I have, as far as I know, found nothing more in it. But you know that isn't the final word."

Cicely took the paper and started to read it carefully. She put it down presently. Apparently it had already yielded all its secrets.

"Still, we can—in fact, we must—start work on that five-mile square, and hope for the best," said Thorold. "Half a million in specie and plate—that isn't an easy thing to carry. Somebody might have seen it being conveyed

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to the cache. They must have used a deal of transport. We could ask questions along that line."

"They probably did their transport at night," urged Cicely. "And then, this looks a very lonely part of the coast."

"It is that," said Thorold. "I've been over it several times. Quite the place they would choose, of course, and a place to make search difficult. But even then, because it's bare—bare in houses, wood, bushes, and all that—that will be enough to make anything out of the way rather pronounced. We might get a clue that way—what do you think, Phillip?"

"I agree with you—both. Also, can we help ourselves? Obviously we have to thank our stars that Providence and my brilliant mental attributes have given us even this clue. And we must act on it. There's no hope that we can dig up the whole five square miles in the few days—or perhaps only one day—we have at our disposal; but we can do our best, and we can trust in luck."

"And we had better not waste time," said Thorold.

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"Quite. And we had better not run risks." Phillip opened a little valise he had brought with him. He brought out five useful-looking automatic pistols—one was smaller than the others.

"This is for you, Cicely. I hope it will only serve as a decoration; but, should you need it, it will be quite efficient. Two for you, Jimmy—since we seem to have the habit of losing them—two for me. Cartridges."

"How about Cudd?"

"You'll find Cudd bulging with artillery. He already has his."

"We must fix a plan, and a time to start," said Thorold.

"I thought we'd get to business—working from Little Munden, just at the northwest join of the line there—somewhere about dawn to-morrow morning," suggested Phillip.

"Could we get there in time?"

"I think so. I have already wired for rooms at that Little Munden inn for to-night. I did it from town."

"Well, of all the Commanders-in-Chief . . ."

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"It saved time, and also it did not raise the suspicion a wire from here might raise."

"You think things out well, Phillip," said Cicely.

"I was brought up on malted thought," admitted the Lieutenant. "I am thinking now, old things, that you will have to hurry. Cudd will be round with the car in seventeen minutes."

CHAPTER XIX

ONE of life's bitterest disillusion is to study, almost with contempt, a small, neat, five-mile square on a map, and then start a search over the five miles of real thing the next morning. When Thorold and Cicely came out of the inn at Little Munden to face five large, raw, square miles of mixed land, they were almost overwhelmed with the hopelessness of the immediate outlook.

Phillip came out shiningly, smiled at the sun and them, and said—

“We'd better start, now, what? Which side of this road will you dig up, Jimmy?”

Thorold swept his glance over the wide, flat, and rather insipid country.

“I never knew creation was so big,” he laughed back. “It's baffling. I thought at first we'd have the car; but, by George, what will the car do, where is it to go?”

“All the same,” said Phillip, “I think we'd

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best have the car. We will do a sort of pilgrimage. . . . Cudd will tool us indolently over all the bucolic roads of this five-mile Kingdom of Golconda. We will keep our eyes open. We will, perhaps, not see the half a million lying in a heap, but we might be able to fix certain points, plots, objectives, and the like, as possible caching places. Also, and above all, we will note the tracts where £500,000 cannot possibly be hidden. We will eliminate the useless—we will also pray hard for luck; I think we shall need a large packet of it.”

Phillip had a large-scale Ordnance map; he plotted out a system of road travel, and, going slowly, they shuttled backward and forward across the five-mile square searching along what main roads there were; turning up, or where that was not possible, walking up, side-tracks, cart lanes, and even field-paths.

Phillip was as light and eloquent and inconsistent as usual, but even though they knew him well, they came to be astonished at the skill, patience, acumen and care that were hidden, as Thorold said, under his exquisite

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parting in the middle. It was, somehow, a different Phillip. He was cheery enough, but now his banter was not teasing. Now he was sedulously accepting their suggestions, not attempting to prove them wrong with his usual airy, rhetorical habit of elimination. He would take any point they offered, and examine and analyse it, and go over the ground until the suggestion had been proved either empty or likely.

He seemed to have an unappeasable love of search, and labour, and detail. They went up tedious cart tracks to nowhere; they looked at likely farm buildings and houses; they got bogged in some of the many swampy tracts of this low land; they went into and through the few small coppices there were in the square. They waded and got mudded in little streams. They sometimes went a mile of weary way from their Napiered ease, to see some tiny point that appeared from the road, to offer some chance. Phillip, too, plotted out fields of vision from houses and villages, and from rises that overlooked big stretches of ground.

"Why do that?" asked Thorold as they stood

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by a little cottage, and Phillip gauged how much could be seen, or not seen, from the ground about it.

“Because,” said Phillip, “unless such a place as this was inhabited by their people at the time—which it was not, for this is sheer marsh dwelling, inhabited by marshmen, and always has been—those people would not risk dumping anything within eye-shot, or ear-shot of the place.” On his map he showed them a little uneven ring drawn round the cottage. “Within that line everything can be seen from this spot. It was not likely that the half-million was buried within that ring, then.”

Thorold, the accurate worker, delighted at the care and solidity of Phillip’s survey. The exquisitely garbed Lieutenant seemed to leave nothing to chance. They came to a lonely and likely spot. Phillip was examining it with care, when he noticed a field a little way away was used for chicken-rearing. He stopped examining. He went over to the field of fowls. There was a woman feeding the noisy chickens. The smile of Phillip won her, they were soon talking.

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"Bonny lot of birds you have," said Phillip.

"Yes-sir," said the woman; "but this baint but a little on 'um. More in the field beyond, and then beyond that to the 'ouse."

"Oh, the house—is there a house?"

"Yew can't see 'um, it's beyond in th' little 'ollow, 'ih away."

"Chickens right up to the house. Do you ever sleep? It must be very noisy."

"I 'spose it is, Sir. An' then, it isn't like. Th' varmints do kick up that noise; but, then, we've growed not to notice it."

"Ah, I see; you've been at it here for some time?"

"Yessir, ten years come next Ladyday."

Phillip spoke a little more, and then came away without finishing his examination. "Not here," he said.

"Why?"

"Chickens."

"And why chickens?"

"The treasure-buriers wouldn't risk it. A bustle in this spot would be likely to disturb the chickens a field away, and then the clarion call of cockerels right up to 'th' 'ouse.' Treas-

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ure-buriers and spies abhor noise as Nature abhors a vacuum."

"Phillip," said Thorold. "You are delightful and fascinating, scientifically speaking. You don't neglect a thing. Everything, even the most unassuming and homely details, come under your eye."

"War has its scientific moments, especially in the Staff work department, you know," said Phillip. "Also war has a grim way of making one appreciate the little homely facts. In the year nineteen hundred and something A.D., in a little, pleasant village of Flanders an Officer and a Gentleman spent romantic moments watching a buxom housewife hang out the pants of her spouse. He thought the act idyllic, beautiful, homely, considering its proximity to shells and death. It was only after the billeted battalion had suffered considerable moral and material damages from accurate shelling that a wise head noted the close connection between the buxom one's washing-days and bombardments. After that the Officer and a Gentleman was ready to see something sinister, and signalling in a pocket

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handkerchief hung out to dry. He had learned a little homely lesson. A bombardment is the very finest system of tuition."

The day seemed slow, petty, and rather meaningless. But they knew, when they got back to the inn for dinner, how exhausting it had been. They knew, too, when they looked at Phillip's large-scale map, how thoroughly they had gone over the ground.

After dinner, they went over the map, their memoried facts, and their notes. Now, as when they started in the morning, the immensity of their gleanings made the search seem singularly hopeless.

"What have we done?" asked Thorold, a little pessimistically. "We have spent an entire day at our work, and found nothing save additional difficulties and labour, and all that—just look at this mass of material we have accumulated."

"Jimmy," said Phillip, "where's the bulldog breed in you? More, where's this scientific bulge of yours? You ought to know that one accumulates a mass of notes and comment and all that, in order to throw most of it away.

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We can throw most of this away. You ask what we have done. We have found that, in the five square miles, quite three square miles of ground can be left alone." He showed his map. The shaded portion of the map—the portion they considered would be unfruitful—covered, in the aggregate, quite three-fifths of the square.

"Also," went on Phillip, "in the remaining two-fifths of ground we have fined down our search to fifteen likely spots. We have, as our day's work, practically thrown away the whole of the five square miles save for those fifteen spots. I call that narrowing-down process a good day's work."

"Yes, it is, I know; but even with those fifteen likely places the task yet remains enormous. The depressing thing about it all is that the country is so flat and featureless—no hills, or big woods, or quarries to give us a large mark . . . now this point near Wix"—he indicated one of the fifteen marks on the map—"I remember that. It is just a low tumulus with a few birch-trees about it—nothing emphatic or pronounced at all to help us.

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And the area there is quite considerable.”

“Many of the areas are considerable,” said Phillip. “However . . .”

Thorold laughed a trifle ruefully.

“You keep calm under it all, Phillip. I don’t know whether to be exasperated or to admire.”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Phillip. “I shall still keep calm. It is no good bucking against facts. That makes the brain unsteady. We’ve just got to go on, grubbing about and praying for luck. The luck business is more urgent than ever.”

“I agree. We have spent one day already. And the Germans may come along any moment.”

Cicely came into the conversation.

“In one way,” she said, “it wouldn’t be against our luck if the Germans did come in. Now that we know the area so well we could gather from them their possible point of concentration. They can’t move £500,000 in a hand-barrow, or in ten minutes—”

“If they want to remove it,” interjected Thorold.

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"I think they will now. They know very well, by this, that we have at least a general idea as to the hiding-place. They must see very well—at least, I think so—that though we are acting independently now, we will be quite ready, if we feel baffled, to hand over our knowledge to the military or the British Government, just as we are going to hand over the discovered cache, if we are successful. Well, they know that that £500,000 is in danger, either from the keen search from ourselves or the large and copious search of the military. If they want to keep that treasure, they must remove it. And to remove it will take trouble and transport and time."

"So that, if we see the Germans concentrating, we can either get in ahead of them or get in touch with the local H.Q., and bring about a big capture—treasure, transports, and spies . . . I see what you mean," agreed Thorold.

"Really," mused Cicely, "really, we should go to H.Q. now?"

"Of course," said Phillip slyly. "Let's do it now."

"Well . . ." hesitated Thorold.

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"I don't know . . ." hesitated Cicely.

"And yet some ass has said in his heart that the love of adventure and romance was dead in this country," chuckled Phillip.

"Oh, well, it's all very thrilling, you know," pleaded Thorold. "I think Cicely has . . ."

"Cicely has said the wisest words of us all. To-morrow we look over our fifteen places, and look out for Germans too."

CHAPTER XX

NEXT morning they saw the first of the Germans.

When they passed him they did not think he was a spy or a German. He was no more than an indolent motor-cyclist, sitting under the hedge at the fork of the road, engaged in contemplation and the satisfaction begot of a good pipe. He did not seem acutely curious as they passed.

They passed him going themselves on the road that led to the coast and to Darlincove—one of those absent-minded little villages that sat itself down centuries ago at an impossible place by the sea, and has since spent its existence wondering why on earth it has been so foolish.

They were not going to Darlincove—they were, in fact, going nowhere near it. A few miles beyond the indolent motor-cyclist Cudd pulled the car into an abominable cart-track,

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and a little way along that track the three alighted to examine the first of the places likely for the cache.

They did not hope for much here. It was no more than an old and ruined cottage standing alone on a desolate piece of flat. "It might have cellars; it is certainly of a good strategic position near the sea as well as the roads," Phillip said. And certainly, as he implied, they couldn't neglect the place. It also had the advantage that it ought to be quickly and easily searched—an admirable advantage for the first work of people likely to suffer from the early-morning feeling.

Although the roof of the neglected cottage had gone completely, the walls were still standing, though there were more gaps than doors and windows in them. Here the care of Phillip came out again. He examined the garden as carefully as the house, and he examined it first. The well gave no scope for hidden treasure-chambers, though Phillip lowered a special electric lamp down its narrow shaft to make sure.

While they were in the garden they heard a

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motor-cycle pass on the road they had left. This did not call for comment; cycles as well as 30-35 Napiers are free of roads.

It was only when they were grubbing about in the house that Cicely proved there might be something more in this motor-cycle business than friend Lothario might have noted.

Thorold and Phillip were busy discovering there wasn't a cellar. Cicely was actually scheduled to look on, but she looked out over the country through a gap in the wall. Presently she made a movement of intentness; then she said—

“Jimmy, Phillip—there is a man watching us very carefully.”

Phillip checked Thorold. He moved over towards the opening in the wall, taking care that the presence of Phillip shouldn't shine out of the gap.

“Can he see you, do you think, Cicely?” he asked, standing in cover and not attempting to look out. Cicely was using cover well, also.

“I don't think he can.”

“Can you see him plainly?”

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"I can see him well, but not plainly. The distance is too great. You will have to use your glasses, Phillip."

Phillip nodded; already he was slipping his glasses from their case.

"Just exactly where is he? Tell me the directions carefully, Cicely. I want to see him at once, before he notices any movement here."

"He's in that clump of bushes beyond the cart-track we have left. It's above the motor, about 300 yards. He is kneeling just about the middle. Well in—I don't suppose Cudd can see him."

"Step back and away, please," said Phillip. With a swift unhesitant movement, he was in the girl's place. His glasses seemed to be to his eyes, he had fixed them on the objective, and was staring, with—it seemed—the same movement that had taken him to his peep-hole. He looked carefully. Then he, too, stood back and away.

"Our friend the contemplative motor-cyclist we passed just now," he said. "He contemplates us. He probably ran by the end of the cart-track, noting that our wheel marks turned

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into it. Beyond the track he left his bike and cut across the fields—and there he is.”

Thorold blew a deep breath.

“They’re here already,” he said.

“One of them is, anyhow,” said Phillip. “I warn you, however, that that doesn’t necessarily mean that we have lost the treasure, and that you can indulge your blackest gloom. It may only mean that they have got track of us, and are keeping us under observation in case of rapid eventualities. It need not even mean that they are now ready to scoff that treasure.”

“But it may—” said Thorold. “We might as well look at every side. Anyhow, what do we do, now?”

“Search; just go on doing that,” said Phillip. “We can’t do anything to that fellow. He would get away before we could touch him. If he’s going to dog us, then we must be dogged.”

They went on searching. They found nothing, and went back to the car. They were careful not to look towards the bushes when they left the ruined cottage. When they were

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in the car, however, Thorold held up his hand. They listened. They heard the distant quick-fire thud of a departing motor-cycle. Phillip fixed his glasses on the bushes. The contemplative motor-cyclist had vanished.

"He's going away, to Darlincove," said Thorold. "That doesn't look like dogging us. . . . Go on, Cudd."

They turned from the cart-track and sped along the Darlincove road in the wake of the motor-cyclist. Again, however, they did not go to Darlincove. Soon they came to a Y junction that led them into a road pushing to the left along the coast to Stethurst. At the turn Thorold said—

"You don't think we ought to follow on to Darlincove?"

"There is nothing to gain," said Phillip. "The ground between here and Darlincove is quite hopeless. Also, we can't be certain that he stopped at Darlincove; or that, if we got there, we'd find anything obvious—if we didn't, that would be a waste of time. No, best go on."

Phillip was talking back from the front

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seat to Thorold and Cicely in the tonneau.

"I don't like the thought of leaving that fellow at large," said Thorold.

Cudd interjected—

"If it's that motor-bikist you is speaking of," said Cudd, "he turned 'ere, went towards Stethurst."

"Sure?" asked Thorold.

"Yessir. Stud tires and a patch on one of 'em. I've been watching it all along."

They went on towards Stethurst. Again, they were not, at that time, going into Stethurst; they had an objective several miles this side of it—an old clay pit that seemed to give chances. Thorold became a little more cheery. He pointed out that the stud tire with the patch was leading them towards the clay pit. He had no sooner expressed his glee, than, sweeping round a bend, at a fine and breakneck speed, the contemplative cyclist came past them. He was by in a blur of dust, but they seemed to recognise him, and Cudd, slowly, showed them the stud tires and the patch making the return journey towards the Darlincove road they had left. Phillip told

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Cudd to go slowly, and watch the road. Thorold asked—

“What, in heaven’s name, does that mean? Why should he double back? And should we?”

“Let’s wait—”

Cudd presently quickened, going on at a good pace. When they were round a bend, he slackened enough to make conversation possible.

“Guess there was a man in that ‘edge, Sir. See ‘im, Sir?”

“Not a sign,” said Phillip, and neither Cicely nor Thorold had seen a man.

“Nor me, Sir; but I lay ‘e was there. The motor-bike feller stopped in the road, there. C’d see where ‘is track ended an’ turned back. All scuffled up, like with ‘is feet. That means ‘e stood for a minnit. There was a little puddle of oil, too. That means ‘e stood to talk, too. It’d bin only drips, if ‘e ‘ad turned.”

They went on. They were all thinking, but they said nothing. When they came to another junction of roads—that is, to the road they would have taken if they had gone

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straight from Little Munden towards Stethurst (they had travelled, by now, on two sides of a triangle)—they all looked about, scanning the country round the meeting-points of the roads. There was nothing in sight.

They all sighed a little.

“I really thought they were watching all the roads for us,” said Thorold. “I expected a sentinel here.”

Phillip admitted similar sensations.

“They may have fixed us by this,” he said. “Having located us and our route, they may now find no difficulty in keeping in touch. We may be under observation even now.”

“You think they are watching us to see what we’re up to,” said Thorold. “So do I. I think they are keeping watch on us, first, because they are afraid we might get to the cache before they get their plans, and they want to check us; and, secondly, because, if we do find the cache, they want to be on the spot to reap the reward of our search. That’s my opinion. I mean to say, if they knew where the cache was, they’d have done something drastic to put

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a stop to our inquisitiveness by this. Do you think that is sound, Phillip?"

"It certainly fits," said Phillip.

As they turned into the Stethurst Road they saw, suddenly, a light American car, carrying two men, going towards Stethurst, but coming from Little Munden. They eyed this car narrowly, and slowed to let it pass them. But it was going at a good pace, and went by in dust and in an entirely unconcerned manner. They very quickly lost sight of it as it swung round the bend towards Stethurst.

"I wonder if that car—but no, we mustn't think every car on the road contains a detachment of spies and enemies," said Thorold.

They followed along the Stethurst road until level with the clay-pit. Here they stopped. They had the whole neighbourhood to themselves, it seemed. They left their car with Cudd and went off to the clay-pit.

The clay-pit was a blank. They searched carefully and diligently, but there was nothing to be found. No sign, no secret, no hint of hidden treasure anywhere about it. They were prepared for failure, and were not

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disappointed that nothing dramatic had occurred.

When they got back to the car they found that they had gone to the wrong place for dramatic somethings. Cudd had been the hero of happenings.

"That American car," he said. "It came back, Sir. It came back slower nor it went, an' when it come near me it went slower still. I ses to myself, 'I don't never like yor kind o' car, and I like you leas't on any.' So, when they came near, I took out me pistol an' begins to polish it with me 'anky—muzzle end *their* way."

Cudd grinned at his own tactics.

"Their faces seemed a bit puzzled-like at the sight o' that pistol. The car sort o' slowed, an' 'esitated. They seemed to tork. Then one feller waved 'is 'and, an' off they went fast. Went on to Little Munden again. An' that's the lot, Sir."

"No sign of return?"

"No, Mr. Phillip. Just went on, without looking back."

Thorold jumped in here.

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“Yes, it does all fit in. They’re just watching us. They’re going to smash us up if they can—that’s why they came slow by the car—but they are not going to cause a fuss in this five square miles *yet*, if they can avoid it. That’s their attitude—guarded alertness, with a readiness to strike if we give a hint that their cache is in danger.”

They got into their car. They went to the next likely point of search—in a sea road to the right of the Stethurst road.

“We’ll have to keep our eyes open and watch for them too,” said Phillip. “One thing, we will be ready for the next German who shows.”

But curiously, though they searched all that forenoon and afternoon, about Stethurst and beyond, and then worked backward again, they never saw another sign of Germans or spying.

The immunity from attention during the day was unexpected and disturbing. They worked through twelve of their likely spots before tea, and not merely did they find no signs of the hidden half-million, but there

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were no indications that the Germans were about, or that spies were watching them, or that transport was being accumulated to carry off the treasure. The absence of Germans was, indeed, disquieting.

They discussed it over tea-cups—or rather, the men did; Cicely had suddenly shown a lack of interest in their talk—had, as suddenly, shown an absorption in the large-scale map. Phillip was perplexed. Thorold was completely mystified.

“Does it knock the bottom out of our ‘watching and waiting’ theory? Or does it mean they are certain of us—can follow us up at any given moment? Or . . .”

Cicely put the map down on the table. She looked up at them—first at Thorold, and then at Phillip.

“It means,” she said, “that we have gone beyond the point where we need watching—beyond the point where we are a danger to that cache.”

Phillip and Thorold looked at her. Thorold was surprised; Phillip’s head nodded, “Go on.”

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"Look at the map," she continued, and there was a thrill of excitement in her voice; "look at the map . . .

"Where on the map did we meet, or suspect, watching Germans? The motor-cyclist, was here where the road divided, going one way to Darlincove, the other to Stethurst. Where did we suspect a watcher in the hedge? Here, just beyond the point where the Darlincove road forked going to Munden and Stethurst. Where did the American car overtake us? Here, where the Darlincove road joined the Munden road going to Stethurst. You see, it is almost a rough triangle—and *there were watchers at each corner of the triangle*. At each corner, mind you, and nowhere in the country beyond. Why?"

"By Jove!" gasped Phillip. "Cicely, you're . . . you're—but go on."

"Oh, how it all works out!" cried the girl, her eyes sparkling. "There is a guard at each corner of the triangle. That means the country within that triangle is the important country—it is the country where we, as searchers for the cache, must not penetrate. . . . But

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no, let me go on. . . . But we've already been there. We examined it. We found one likely spot in it. Here it is, a little group of trees, marked No. 14—the fourteenth likely spot on the list. What is there remarkable about that spot, Phillip?"

Phillip turned over his notes.

"No. 14," he said. "Curiously unexpected solid patch in midst of marshy land. Depression in centre. Likely. Very remote. Not overlooked. A little clump of trees, mostly elms . . ."

"Elms," breathed Cicely. "Elms—oh, Phillip!"

Phillip looked at her. His eyes caught some of her wonder and amazement. He looked, gasped, and turned abruptly on Thorold.

"Jimmy, for the love of Mike, Brandt's paper!"

He took and opened out the paper feverishly. Then he read in a voice that refused to drawl—

" . . . If necessary, if duplicate plans are needed, write to G. B. of Rotterdam. Embody

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in letter, a sentence about the wind blowing off the limb of an *elm*-tree.' The limb of an elm-tree—my hat, Jimmy, Cicely has found the place of the half-million cache!"

CHAPTER XXI

THEY stood about Cicely enormously excited. They forgot their tea in their sense of triumph. Cicely, after the manner of successful people the world over, belittled her victory.

“Well, we haven’t beaten them yet,” she cried. “We haven’t the treasure, and you can be sure they’ll fight for it to the end. And then when we get to the elms, there’ll be a search to be made, and they might be watching there—”

“We’ve got our hands on half a million through you, Cicely, and we can only think of that,” cried Thorold. “We are bound to outwit them, now. We must—and now we know the cache is at the elms, we are bound to find it—half a million isn’t easily hidden—No, we’ve won.”

Phillip sat down.

“There is, however, a great deal in what

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Cicely says. It has reminded me of my tea."

"I can't eat bread and cakes, and drink out of a cup at a moment like this," said Thorold. "I want to be up and doing."

"You'll up and do much more efficiently with a good meal inside you," said Phillip. "You'll want that meal before you are through, let me tell you, and you'll want more than a meal. I'm about to order things with good, red meat in them. Good fighting only comes of good eating."

He ordered very solidly. They were in a commercial hotel, in a village near Stethurst, and from time immemorial the commercial hotels have fully understood the heart and appetite of man.

Thorold glanced askance at the liberal supply.

"These mountains of food almost suggest the baked meats of the funeral feast, Phillip."

"As you like—" said the graceless young man. "Let us hope that it is a Boche funeral, anyhow."

"And it means that you are supplying us for immediate action."

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"Quite," said Phillip.

"Good," said Thorold. "Actually I want to start right now. But I'll postpone it to eat, if that will be to our benefit. We leave after this?"

"Why not?"

"I mean, you won't leave the attack until the dark."

"The light is our Ally," said Phillip. "We're going to employ it. Those chappies can't move until their movements are hidden by secret Mother Night. Daylight boldness won't help them. But it will help us. They must show circumspection in attacking us; at least, if it is light. So, since we have about four hours of evening left, we must make the best of them. We will try and do all we can before night comes; for with night will come the cohorts of the Hun. If they catch us there at night, they'll make no mistakes about us this journey; whereas, if we uncover the cache, prove the treasure there, we can get in touch with H.Q., put all our facts before them, and, at our luckiest, put the military in charge of the half-million before night comes; or, if

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not so lucky, we'll be able to get the news to them so that they can move before the Boches move. It sounds simple, but it won't be."

"No; they'll give us as much trouble as they can."

"Quite; but we must try and make it as little as possible."

"By planning?"

"By planning."

Phillip opened out the map showing the triangle of roads, and the point marked: "Likely spot No. 14."

"They help us a little, these Germans," he said. "Apparently, as Cicely points out, they are guarding only the angles of the triangle; and, therefore, it seems to me that we will not be seen unless we try to pass any of those angles. Well, then, we won't pass them."

He put his finger on the spot where Cudd and his pistol had encountered the American car; that is, the point on the road where they had dismounted to examine "Likely spot No. 2."

"You notice that there are quite a number of field-paths on the map, but notice particu-

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larly the one just by my finger. It starts from a point quite near where we stopped the car, and strikes towards the coast. Follow that footpath, and you will meet another, but one striking back towards the bottom side of the triangle formed the side formed by the Darlin-cove-Stethurst road. That field-path enters the triangle *behind* the guarded points as it were. They may be on the alert, but to go that way will give us theoretically the least chances of being seen." He paused.

"Well, I think this is the plan. We leave the car somewhere out of sight of the angle-point nearest these field-paths, and we take to the fields. There are hedges about there, fortunately. We work along the hedges until we locate the field-track going to the coast; then we work across the fields, using what cover we can—hedges or ditches. I'm afraid it will be muddy work—following the line of the field-path. When we come to the branch that goes towards the triangle we do the same thing—in the direction of the triangle. Once at the triangle, we go under the best cover possible to the elms at 'Likely point No. 14'—and that will

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probably be the beginning of the business.”

“Only let us get there—we can’t fail.”

“In case we fail,” said Phillip imperturbably. “In case anything goes wrong, we must instruct Cudd. Cudd is really our only excuse for risking things. If we are not back by a certain hour—say, an hour after dark—Cudd must go off to the military with Brandt’s paper (I have looked it up; there is a camp outside Stethurst), and he must tell the bare facts of our story, and of the danger to the cache. Also, if Cudd hears a rumpus, a noise of fighting and shooting, or anything untoward, he must keep out of it, and go to the camp as fast as the Napier will carry him. At all costs he must save that half million—”

“And us,” said Thorold.

“And us—if, under the circumstances, we *can* be saved,” said Phillip evenly.

Quietly they examined and stowed in convenient pockets, pistols, torches, and the like. Then they went out to the car.

Not even Thorold protested that such an adventure was not for Miss Cicely. She had earned her right to take risks.

CHAPTER XXII

THE day had become grey, which was a nuisance, because it shortened the light, but they still had over three hours to darkness when they set out.

The car was stopped well on the Stethurst side of "Likely Point No. 2," and Cudd was instructed what to do in case of their non-return, or in case of anything untoward and noisy happening. He was also told the story he was to give to the C.O. of the camp near Stethurst. Phillip also wrote a note to go with Brandt's paper.

Cudd listened stoically, but he seemed to indicate by his manner that to leave a chauffeur out of the fun was conduct not quite worthy of an officer and a gentleman. Phillip cheered him up by hinting that there was some chance of stray or inquiring spies coming his way; in that case there might be some demand on his gunnery work—as had happened before.

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“I only ’ope, Sir,” said Cudd, “that some of them do meet with that accident.”

They left him taking up strategic positions and planning fields of fire.

There were hedges, as Phillip had said, most of the way, and they could follow these hedges parallel with the field-path leading to the sea most of the way. To cross to the path striking towards the triangle was another matter. They came to the edge of bare fields, with only dykes to cover them until they reached the hedge bordering the Darlincove-Stethurst road.

Phillip bade them crouch in a ditch, under the hedges, while he went away to reconnoitre. He went very quietly, and seemed an unusual time away.

When he came back they could see that he had something unexpected to tell.

“Doesn’t this look enormously lonely?” he whispered, and with a jerk of his hand he indicated the whole bleak and empty country. And it was—enormously lonely. Nothing but flat and mean fields, with a soil so swampy that cultivation was impossible. Not merely were

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the trees of a thin and wretched kind, and the bushes bedraggled and low, but there was no sign of human effort or human habitation anywhere—for the dykes and the bushes seemed untrammelled and unkempt. The whole was desolate, empty, depressing. They knew, though they could not then see, that behind the thin hedge was a flat and ugly foreshore, useless and impossible to man, for the great muddy wastes of beach made a shallow and inhospitable sea. It was certainly enormously lonely.

“Enormously lonely,” said Phillip; “and yet there are two men not fifty yards from us. They are lying under a bush and watching the sea.”

“Spies?” whispered Thorold.

“I think so, but everything here is so quiet that I dare not go near them. They are lying there watching the sea. It’s infernally strange.”

“Are they on guard?”—from Thorold.

“But with what object?” Phillip thought. “You certainly can see the elms from their position, but their backs are to the elms. You

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can probably see the elms from the sea, but how does that fit in? . . . Unless they think we might try to trick them by coming along the beach."

"That is the reason," said Thorold with decision. "You said they are careful, Phillip, and they are. They are guarding every avenue. I suppose they can sweep the whole beach?"

"Yes, they can. The guarding rôle is probably the idea. Now how are we going to pass over these fields so close to them?"

This, obviously, was a question he could only answer himself, so they did not interrupt his thoughts. He examined the country as he thought.

"There's nothing for it except mud-wallowing." He looked at Cicely. "We can get into that dyke over there under cover, and that dyke will carry us to that hedge right across the way that leads, rakishly, to the road. It'll be muddy and demned moist, Cicely—mud to the ankles, water to about the waist, but the banks of the dyke will hide our heads if we keep low . . ."

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Cicely tilted her chin. With a bold and modest gesture she lifted her skirts about her waist. With an unhesitant step she moved across and slipped noiselessly into the dyke. She went on, not looking round.

Phillip laughed, and nodded Thorold to follow. He touched his pistol-pocket. "I'll cover the movement," he said. "But I don't think action will be necessary. Those fellows are very intent on the sea and shore; they won't think of looking round—and I don't think they would see us if they did."

They didn't.

On the road the pace quickened.

Thorold and Cicely had slipped across the road from the cover of hedges to the cover of hedges. Phillip had only gained the road when a big lout slouched round the corner.

He was a big lout; he looked extraordinarily like an English yokel—he might, indeed, have been an English yokel. He stood, bucolic, dull in the face of Phillip, rather surprised at the unexpected apparition of a singularly muddy British officer in these lonely parts. The surprise was yokeldom to the life

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—but it might be yokeldom acted to the life.

It was a moment for instant and searching action. Phillip was instantaneous.

"Wie weit ist es bis zum nächsten Dorfe?" he asked, without hesitation.

"Nehmen Sie die—" stumbled the man before he saw the trap; then he jumped back with a snarled *"Donner."* He opened his mouth to yell—

"Hands up, Fritz," snapped Phillip. He stepped up close with his pistol in line with the fellow's stomach. The spy's big hand struck at the pistol, and the spy went slumping back and earthward with pronounced force. Phillip had dropped him with a left swing to the jaw.

Thorold jumped out onto the road.

"Pull him to the hedge and through it," said Phillip. "Rotten business, this."

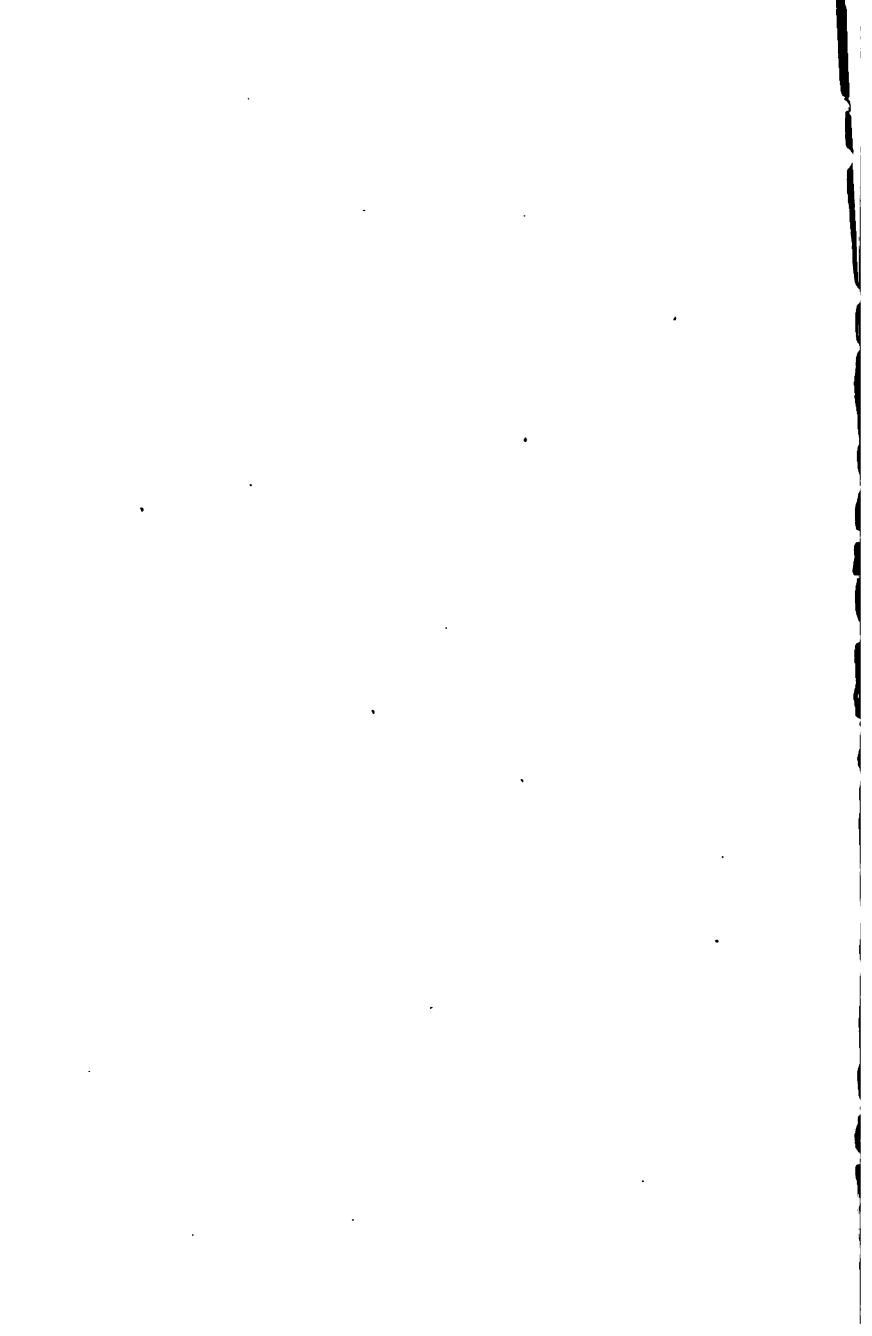
They tugged the man into the field.

"He'll come round in a minute," cried Phillip, "and he'll yell. He'll do it for the Vaterland, and then expect us to make a martyr of him. Gag him."

As he spoke, Phillip picked from the



Phillip had dropped him with a left swing to the jaw.



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ground a stout bit of branch. He forced the spy's mouth open, fixed the wood between the teeth, and with a very serviceable bit of cord from the spy's own pocket, they lashed the gag firmly. Then, with the spy's braces, bootlaces, tie, and a segment of wire Phillip found in the hedge, they trussed the fellow very prettily. They took it in turns to drag him along under the hedge until they came to a dry ditch well away from the road. In that ditch they left him, and went onward to the elms.

They felt they had the need to hurry now. If the Germans were Germans, they were patrolling the roads. One of their bright boys would go the round on the motorcycle, or in the little car, and they would look out for Fritz the yokel, and he would not be there.

That meant hurry, hurry. If Fritz wasn't there, the Germans would know why. They would know that there was danger, and they would know where that danger was. Hurry, hurry, they must find the cache under the elms before the Germans came to the elms to look for the conquerors of Fritz.

"Quite. And Phillip opened with him. He had an automatic pistol on him and shot at the others.

"This is for you. It will serve as a decoration. It will be quite effective—since we seem to have them—two for me."

"How about Cu?"

"You'll find Cu. He already has his."

"We must fix a plan," said Thorold.

"I thought we'd start from Little Munde and join the line there to-morrow morning."

"Could we get there?"

"I think so. I have a horse at that Little Munde. I'll get it from town."

"Well, of all things, Chief . . ."

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The day was filling with the duskiness of grey endings. There was a vagueness and falseness about the light. They knew that they must expect premature darkness. They hurried on, pressing across the boggy fields against the hedges. The dusky fields were enormous, and stark, and lonely.

They reached the clump of trees. They were on a little hummock of ground rising above the sodden land that surrounded. There were not many trees, but some of them were stout, and of these a few were the elms. And all these trees seemed to stand about a little bush-grown depression in the hummock. They were as the pillars of a temple, and here in the middle was the grim sacrificial ring. They came to the edge of the depression and saw it, grim and ugly, and sinister at their feet; and they knew, instinctively, that somewhere close was the treasure, somewhere close was the half-a-million pounds' worth of gold and of plate. It seemed a fitting place to hold in keeping that vast amount.

The dusk seemed caught among the trees, and they looked spectral. Thorold peered

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at them, looking at each. Then he said—

“There are only three elms. That should simplify matters.”

Nobody whispered “Listen,” but they all stood, and they all listened.

There came a long, purrish rush of explosions from the road. They heard it softly, distantly. It passed and died. It was gone, they thought. They stood, and listened. After an eternity of minutes, they heard soft purring explosions coming back again. Coming slowly.

They all turned to the little depression again. They knew what was necessary. It was hurry—hurry!

“Three elms,” said Thorold again. “It is one of these—it must be.”

“No,” said Phillip quickly. “It is only one of one elm. Look at that big branch.”

They looked at the great branch of the biggest elm. It seemed to be the only branch on the tree, so much did it dominate the gaze. But it wasn't the size that held their eyes. It was the curious circumstance of the branch. The branch was broken. Near the trunk was

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a great fracture, as though it had been half-torn from its sockets by the force of a great wind. As though the force of another great wind might blow it down altogether.

Phillip quoted—

“‘Embody in the letter a sentence about the wind blowing off the limb of an elm-tree.’”

“It is a direction,” cried Thorold.

“It is,” said Cicely, “look.” With her finger she traced the line of the branch, and they followed its direction across the bush-lined depression. Exactly in line with the limb on the opposite side of the bushy place—exactly opposite—there was a space entirely bare of bushes.

It looked quite natural, that bare space, until the line of the branch emphasised it. There were other bare spaces in the hollow, but, until they looked, none were noticeably so large as this. They could see that if the plans were lost, if the limb was blown down, it would not be simple to find the spot. It was covered with even turf, as the rest of the hollow was covered with turf; there was nothing to emphasise it—unless one had directions.

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It was only when Phillip struck deep with the trenching-tool that they found the turf was no more than six inches deep. The oaken trap underneath had been covered with sods and Nature had completed the disguise.

There was a heavy lock on the oaken trap, but with the trenching-tool Phillip wrenched that off, and the cover was lifted. A flight of steps, treaded beautifully by a craftsman who understood field-engineering, led down into the earth. The treasure-chamber was open to them.

Phillip motioned Thorold and the girl downward. Somebody must stay up on guard, and he was going to be that one.

Thorold and Cicely went down the steps into the cave of Golconda. They went down deeply, using their torches to fight the dark. At the end of the steps they found themselves in a chamber unpleasantly low; but startlingly broad and long.

There was nothing of the glitter and enchantment of jewels and gems, of rich rare things spilled and heaped about in romantic wantonness, in the chamber. There was no

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dazzling vision of enormous wealth. There was, indeed, no sense of the fabulous and precious about that huge, damp-smelling cavern. There were only long and massive rows of wooden packing-cases. Only aisles and blocks of these cases stretching between the wood-cased walls and the wood-cased floor and ceiling of the cellar. Only rows and rows of cases, as in a factory warehouse—and they contained *five hundred thousand pounds* in gold sterling, in plate, in jewelry, and trinkets. The Incas' hoard, as it were, done up in the manner of a Wood Street packing-room.

But the blunt solidity of the ranks of solid wealth impressed the senses. They looked breathlessly—

And Phillip was calling down to them.

They ran up to him, and his hand stretched out to the fields.

The fields were full of the imminent night. Shadows shifted and swung over the grass and over the bushes. The fields seemed vast, lonely, hushed.

And a grey figure moved in them.

They saw the grey figure of this man move

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out of a shadow, and into shadow again. And to the right of him they saw another. And away to the right, another. And there to the left were others moving.

"They've encircled us," said Phillip. "It's the same on the other side. Luckily, on the left flank the bog is at its worst, but front and rear right they're there. There are three of us—we'll have to do our best. Luckily, again, we can take cover in the depression, and will have a fair field of fire. Then we must fall back to the cellar entrance and hold that from the stairs, or—"

"There are packing-cases down there," said Thorold.

"Or from behind the packing-cases. Good for us that they will be willing to lose men rather than lose those packing-cases, by damage, or by blowing up the cellar, or anything really cataclysmic. Cicely had better take the right flank; it will give her the shortest route to the cellar. We must all fall back at the slightest threat. It will be fatal to let them get close up. You take the rear, Thorold."

"Right oh," said Thorold. (These seden-

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tary men, they are gluttons for fighting.)

“And there’s another thing—can you see anything on the sea?”

“A lot of shadows only. A grey-black mass, generally speaking, no more.”

“Well, I have seen something more on the sea. There is a boat of some sort out there, Jimmy. I picked up with my glasses what I thought was a shadow—and it had a ship’s profile. I don’t know what it is. It was too dark to see well. But there is something there, and it is connected with those two watching men, and the half-million in that vault underneath. I believe that is the way the stuff is to be transported.”

“Dare they run the risk of our Fleet?”

“For half a million, yes. It may be a submarine of sorts. One of the trading kind—I don’t know. But I think it is mixed up with this.”

The grey men were now some four hundred yards away. They were moving cautiously, as men knowing that a defence was in possession.

“To your post, Jimmy,” said Phillip. “And

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shoot as much as you like. We must make a great row for the benefit of Cudd—and remember, too, that all military noise is suspect about here. Shooting will attract a great deal of curiosity for miles around; we might get coastguards, or V.T.C. battalions, along minutes only after the first fusillade. And there might be patrol-boats within hearing on the sea. British patrol-boats. We aren't in for a cushy time, but there are chances. So don't be afraid to make a noise. Shoot vigorously—I'm going to begin now."

Two grey figures moved out of the shadows. They seemed to move slowly. Phillip sighted his pistol, and fired.

The shot broke into the lonely air with an unspeakable clamour. The enormous silence seemed to make the sound enormous. Phillip fired again.

There was a yell. There was only one grey man running now towards a shadow.

Phillip emptied his magazine.

As his shooting stopped, three grey men started up. This was an opportunity to charge. Phillip chuckled. He began to fire his second

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pistol immediately. Immediately there were only two men.

The grey men did not shoot.

At once there was the shattering and quick explosion of an automatic pistol on Phillip's right. Cicely was firing.

From behind came the running stutter of shots, too. Thorold was firing.

"We're in for it," Phillip chuckled.
"We're deep in it."

CHAPTER XXIII

THEY were "in for it," as Phillip had said. Obviously, the Germans were bound to force the pace—it was, indeed, necessary for them to do this. Quickness was their only salvation: with these three young people making the country ring with their firearms, armed forces might appear on the scene at any moment.

Their attack, then, was rapid. They came running at the little mound in a swift, stealthy manner. They did not fire; they were not eager to fire—unless they fired to kill; and that they could not do, for the defenders were well in cover. They came on noiselessly, refusing to create uproar themselves.

Phillip now was quiet, but he heard the snap-snap-snap-snap of Cicely's pistol. Then, on top of that sound, Thorold fired a full magazine again, and there was a yell from the farther side. Thorold had hit. There

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was a little pause, and Thorold opened once more. Phillip himself had no opportunity to shoot for a full two minutes; then "crack-crack"—there was one spy less.

Phillip liked the rather ragged manner in which the enemy were fighting. That meant that they were not advancing to plan yet; they were wasting strength and time in ragged efforts.

In the pause he called out softly to Cicely, "How goes it?"

"Not badly," the girl called back. "They've stopped coming on. I have what you would call a lovely field of fire here—flat ground, and very marshy at that. They have to walk carefully, and they can't run. While they're moving I scare them badly with my pistol-fire—even if I don't hit anyone."

"They'll find that out in a minute," thought Phillip. He glanced down at his own opponents. They were very quiet. He thought that the line of figures seemed thinner in the shadows. He asked Thorold how things were working out.

"Two to my rod and spear," said the chem-

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ist, in a happy tone. "And they have dropped down—all of them—to think."

Phillip looked back to his own enemy. He noted in a swift glance two things—one, not vital at this moment, that a light was winking out at sea where he had seen the shadow of a ship; two, that a man, if not two men, had risen and slunk off round to the right—to Cicely's zone of fire. He saw the shadow of them running, and, a moment after, there was a long whistle. The line of his own enemies rose up, and, "crack-crack-crack," two were down. Thorold also was firing rapidly. Cicely called out and began firing wildly.

Phillip jumped across to Cicely.

"Phil-lip," she called, "there are more men here than before."

"I know," cried Phillip. "Run to my post and blaze away. I'll humour this lot."

He dropped down, and sighted.

Of course, there were more there. The Germans had realised, with their usual acuteness, that the shooting from this flank was harmless, because a woman was doing the shooting. They had therefore thrown all their

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men on to this flank, with the object of rushing it; and, at the same time, they had attacked on the other flanks (where the shooting was good) to occupy the attention of the men. Their real attack was here.

Phillip smiled grimly. He would show them some real defence. He watched over his foresight the almost nonchalant and erect movement of the enemy as they came over the boggy ground. Their attitudes seemed to suggest that they were certain of reaching the mound, as they were certain of escaping the purely feminine stream of bullets. They plunged forward over a dryish patch of ground into a watery bit. They bunched a little.

Phillip let them have it from the full magazine; let them have it from the half-finished magazine.

The bunch melted. It was as though the spray of a machine-gun hail had struck the men. They simply vanished. There was some yelling, there were tossed arms, and the general air of a whirlwind about the group, and then all dropped to that particularly

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boggy earth. Phillip did not think that he had killed the whole group, but he knew that he had done more damage than ever the Germans had dreamed possible: those remaining whole would lie there for a moment suffering from the shock.

Thorold was firing, and Thorold was laughing, too. Cicely was firing again. In front of Phillip a whistle blew. Thorold and Cicely stopped firing.

"The second wave of the attack is scuppered," said Philip softly, as he recharged his pistols. "The next move, I fear, will be more subtle."

It was getting extremely dark now. The chances of the Germans were increasing. But the minutes were speeding. The enemy must press matters to evade the help which time must bring.

"What's doing?" called Phillip.

"Nothing," said Thorold. "I got another that time. I can see him lying out there in the open. He is wriggling a little, poor brute."

"Watch him," cried Phillip. "He may

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be wriggling for a beastly purpose. . . . Cicely?"

"Nothing. They are very quiet. There is a light out at sea though, winking. And—and yes, there is a light beyond the road, answering."

"I'd give my kingdom to watch that signaling carefully," Phillip muttered. "But it's probably in cipher, anyhow."

He was convinced that an enemy vessel of some sort was lying out there in that shallow sea, and that the object of the vessel was to take off the treasure in the underground vault. He wondered if the signal was to warn the enemy boat, or ask it to land seamen for fighting ends.

Thorold called out. As he called, he fired twice. Then he was silent. In a moment he said, "Quite right about the wriggler, Phillip. He was writhing very carefully to a line of cover that would bring him on top of me. I don't think he'll . . ."

"*That man,*" breathed Cicely. "Look out, Phillip; he's coming right at you."

Phillip turned in a flash. A man burst from

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a dyke under a hedge, ran up the mound at Phillip. As he ran his hand went out, and the pistol in it fired and fired. Phillip flung himself flat, and as he did this Cicely—Cicely, who couldn't shoot, let the whole of her magazine rip off, and the fellow went down in a heap.

Another man was out of the hedge after the first. From a little dip in the ground other men sprang up. Thorold was shouting. A man rose from the earth, charged at Cicely, and threw her down.

The gloom of the trees seemed full of men charging and fighting. But it wasn't really so full as it seemed. Half-a-dozen men had crawled close to the place, and were trying to rush it. The other men in the distance rose up, too, and started to run in.

The man rose from Cicely, lifted a big stick to strike. The whole large weight of large Phillip hit him in the ribs like a missile, and he sprawled and screamed. Thorold and another man twisted and stumbled; and Thorold fired, and the man fell backwards. Two men were lifting rifles to shoot; one of them was

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kneeling. Phillip swept his automatic round, firing the while; one man fired and jumped for a tree; the other slipped and fell over, and his rifle went off as he fell. No hurt to Cicely or Phillip, but none to the two men either. And more men were coming up. They were outnumbered now. The defence of the mound was ended.

Phillip caught Cicely's hand and pulled her to her feet, and pushed her towards the opening of the cellar. Thorold fired wildly at the darkness, and ran inward.

"Look after Cicely," shouted Phillip, and he stood guard over the entrance as the two scrambled down the steps. A marksman began to fire from the bushes, and the bullet screamed by Phillip's cheek. Phillip turned and jumped to the cellar. He ran down six steps, paused, swung round, and waited. In a moment there was a rush of bodies to the opening above him—men eager to get down before he could reach bottom. Phillip fired upward into the pack of them.

The square of the opening cleared at once. He went down to where Thorold was already

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trying to drag packing-cases forward to form a barricade.

“No,” cried Phillip; “don’t try to move those cases. You will merely commit infamy to your internal organs, and you won’t shift ’em. Also leave them so—and someone give me an electric-torch.”

Curious Phillip: he was smiling. He was thoroughly pleased with life. He stationed Thorold and the girl behind the packing-cases, where they could take the stairs. He ran forward, switched on the torches, placed them so that their hard light shone straight on the steps, and the cleared space at the foot of the steps. He ran back into the gloom of the packing-cases.

“That gives us an invisible cap, it dazzles them, and allows us to shoot with the maximum of comfort.”

A man came charging down the stairs. He was a monster of a man—indeed, uncannily, he looked two men. He was, in fact, one live and one dead man—he held a dead comrade before him as a shield.

When he was half-way down the steps

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Phillip sighted carefully. The roar of the pistol filled the cavern with thunder. But the man fell as easily as a man falling to sleep. There was no violence in his fall: he sank gently on the steps—which was the purpose of Phillip's shooting. As he sank down something fell out of his hand onto the steps beside him. In five seconds there was a slight flash, a low explosion, and a dense, greasy mess of smoke began to rise up.

"Stink-bomb," said Phillip. "It was meant to smoke us out. But I guess they will get the full benefit of *that*."

Two men in gas-masks edged down the steps. They came boldly through the smoke, but directly the bitter light of the torches struck them they hesitated. Both Thorold and Phillip fired. One man sprang upward for his life; the other fell, got up, fell again, and then scrambled madly up the steps. His right leg trailed helplessly.

Phillip borrowed Cicely's torch and went down the aisles of packing-cases flashing it. In a minute he came back with the top of a packing-case he had found loose somewhere.

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"Jimmy," he said, "you are only a decimal-something shot. You had better be the demon fanner instead. Just wave this about so that a strong current of air pushes up through that opening. The stink-bomb idea will be repeated."

It was, almost at once. A bomb came down, bounced, rolled towards the packing-cases, burst. The air became Stygian with thick fumes. Thorold fanned. The fumes set steadily towards the steps. By good luck there must have been a fair air-vent somewhere in the depths of the cellar. As Thorold fanned, the smoke swirled back to them very little.

But the smoke did trail about a great deal. They were soon in a mist of it, and choking. Cicely was sent deep into the cellar.

The two young men watched carefully, with smarting eyes. There was need to do that. The cellar steps were obscured, and once a German, looking weird, inhuman, and Martian, bulked up out of the mist.

"Tackle him, Jimmy!" yelled Phillip. He had taken the care to mark the range and direction of the steps on his packing-case barri-

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cade. He could not see the steps, but he fired his pistol steadily in that direction. There was a scuffling. At least a man or two seemed to be making tracks for higher planes, at the moment that Jimmy dodged a bayonet—very prettily—and smote the gas-helmeted Martian with a swinging upper-cut stroke of his packing-case lid. The man went over backwards—they saw his quite large feet sticking out of the smoke—then he rose and ran.

But one man did gain a vantage at the bottom of the steps. They saw the flash of his shooting in the womb of smoke, and bullets began to slap and flicker among the packing-cases.

“Get down low, Jimmy!” shouted Phillip. “Things are getting more than neutral. Look wise for splinters.”

Phillip already had a splash of fine wood splinters in his cheek—a wound more painful than dangerous. But there were bigger splinters in the air—and bullets too.

By now the Germans could be said to have worked themselves into an advantageous position. They had won their way into the

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cellar. Behind their smoke the first marksman, and then another, and another, had gained a footing. They were beginning to dominate the situation. It was becoming dangerous to fire at them, for each pistol-flash brought a rain of bullets in return. Thorold learnt this almost too precisely. He saw a shadow, and loosed. Almost immediately, the corner of the packing-case above his head was shot to pieces, and a shower of splinters—and British sovereigns—scattered down on him. He shifted his position quickly; took cover in another side aisle.

Phillip looked at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch. They had been fighting for three-quarters of an hour—fighting just eats up time. He tried to gauge a period when Cudd was likely to turn up with reinforcements. But there was nothing to go by. Cudd might come along at any moment—and he mightn't. Meanwhile, their time was only minutes to go. The Germans surely had the upper hand of them.

A smoke-bomb came bumping down each

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aisle. As the smoke rose there was a guttural shout, and they heard the rush of determined feet. Lying on their faces, both Phillip and Thorold opened fire. There were cries of pain, but the rush came on.

“This,” thought Phillip, “this is the moment when the band plays ‘Deutschland über Alles.’”

A man pushed out of the smoke; Phillip fired, and the man went to cover behind a packing-case. Phillip, his eyes and throat full of smoke, knew that he had not hit—had only put off the evil day. He heard no firing from Thorold. Thorold had doubled back, perhaps, as they had agreed. He had better go, too.

He got ready to go. He stopped.

Even in that confined space, even underground, he heard the heavy, solid “bu-rump” of a big gun.

He was startled.

The big gun—or rather, the biggish gun—went off again.

“A four-inch,” he breathed; “a four-inch.”

On top of it he heard the crackling of

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many rifles, like the sound of flames in the heart of a dry wood-pile. That was company firing.

A man with an enormous voice was yelling and yelling and yelling from the cellar steps . . . there was the maddest rush of Germans toward the exit.

Phillip chuckled.

“And now, my good friends, my little story of the doings of Phillip, and Jimmy and his Maid, draws to a close,” he grinned.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALMOST at once, it seemed, they heard a fresh young voice calling from the steps in lamentable German (and British), "You are entirely surrounded and at our mercy. Throw down your arms—and come out, you blighters."

"But don't the English eat their prisoners?" called Phillip, in an injured tone. "*Kamerad*, do not serve me up *en casserole*."

"Look here," stammered a disturbed junior, "look here, you know—none of that—no rotten tricks—you know."

The blessed voice of Cudd came to them through the thinning smoke.

"Excuse me, Sir," said Cudd, speaking to the invisible junior, "but there's a 'int of Mr. Phillip in that manner o' speaking. Mr. Phillip—Mr. Mainwairing, Sir, the Staff-Lieutenant."

"Oh, I say, Mainwairing—Phillip—if

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that's you, you sublime idiot, hop along out. They're beat."

Phillip and Thorold and Cicely hopped along to the subaltern, a young man with an unspotted intelligence, and an old friend of Phillip's. His name—but I don't know that it matters—was Egbert.

As they went along the aisles they kicked through a little pile of sovereigns.

"They're ours," thought Phillip. "Our winnings—half a million of 'em."

They arose to decent smokeless air. There was half a company of an East Coast garrison (Service) regiment about. All grinned, though they had several prisoners with them who grinned not.

"Cudd did the trick," said Phillip. "Bravo, Cudd!"

"Thank heavens for Cudd!" said Thorold.

"Or rather," said Egbert, "he caught us just when we were thinking that nothing short of a miracle would save us from the loathliest night maneuvers. Up comes our Cudd, like a petroly miracle . . . and by all that's

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lucky our transport is mechanical, and was empty . . . and here we are, two double companies of us."

Out at sea there lifted the quick and angry boom of the gun again.

"Exactly what part in the scheme of things is that?" asked Phillip.

"Oh—oh," said Egbert, "oh, you don't know that dramatic bit, of course. Look, my fair Phillip."

He pointed out to sea.

The moon, nearly full now, was doing its best, behind the clouds, to give a certain amount of light. The clouds had the better of the struggle in the main, but there was a vast, pale light that showed up the sea and certain black shadows on the sea. Also one of the shadows was using a searchlight, and the searchlight had found and held its quarry with firm and unfaltering bitterness.

The object was a queer, squat, but obviously large vessel of indefinite sort. And she was doing her best to make for the open sea—like the *Hesperus*.

"We wirelessed her—that patrol petroler,"

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said the enthusiastic Egbert. "She was laying off, and she got going at the top of her ac-ac knottage. She's got that sub cooked for sure now."

They saw a sparkle of light break from the shadow bearing the searchlight. A thick shadow of spray leaped upward in the light of the beam close to the frantic German U-boat. The U-boat answered with her own gun flash, but it was nervous. The patrol-boat had flashed twice again before the enemy craft had fired once.

"Why doesn't she submerge?" cried Thorold. "You'd think—"

"You can't think that," said Phillip, "because it can't be done, old thing. She's crept in too close to get this treasure. Sea is too shallow . . ."

"Got her!" shouted Egbert. "Got her, my hat!"

A flower of flame, that was first a spark, and then a great jumping tongue, leaped from the flying submarine. She held on her course, then she yawed wildly, staggered, came broadside to the sea, went out in a wallow,

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then lifted black again, then came lurching and staggering shoreward. Three bursts of fire slapped out of her as she staggered. She broached drunkenly in the searchlight; she vomited a most horrid column of flame—and there was only the sea and the searchlight, and the patrol boat quartering round for any lucky man who had come out alive.

The soldiers all about were cheering.

A Captain came out of the fields.

"That's the end of the sub," he called; "and I guess we've bagged the lot that remained on land. . . . And where's that precious Hidden Treasure fiend Phillip Mainwairing?"

"Oh, very fit, Hulse," said Phillip to another of his many good friends. "The precious idiot is here, but slightly besprinkled by precious metal—half-a-million of which you will find hidden in the Caverns Deep beneath. How do?"

Captain Hulse came up and shook hands.

"Phillip, you're inevitable. I don't quite know whether I am to congratulate you—or put you under arrest."

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"You can't arrest the unearthers of half a million—it's not done."

"No—I suppose not. Also, with that tongue of yours, you'll take eloquent care it won't be done. . . . And, my dear old thing, it *is* a very sporting haul. Really magnificent. You ought to get something for this—an official reprimand, *and* the D.S.O."

"Nothing for me," said Phillip. "Not my funeral. . . ." He looked round to where Thorold and Cicely stood, curiously aloof, as only an engaged couple can stand curiously aloof in a crowd; he nodded to the charming pair, standing in charming proximity. "But I really think they ought to give Jimmy, and Miss Cicely, a knighthood—as a wedding present."

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